SCIENCE FICTION

JULY 1972 • 75¢ 14155-6

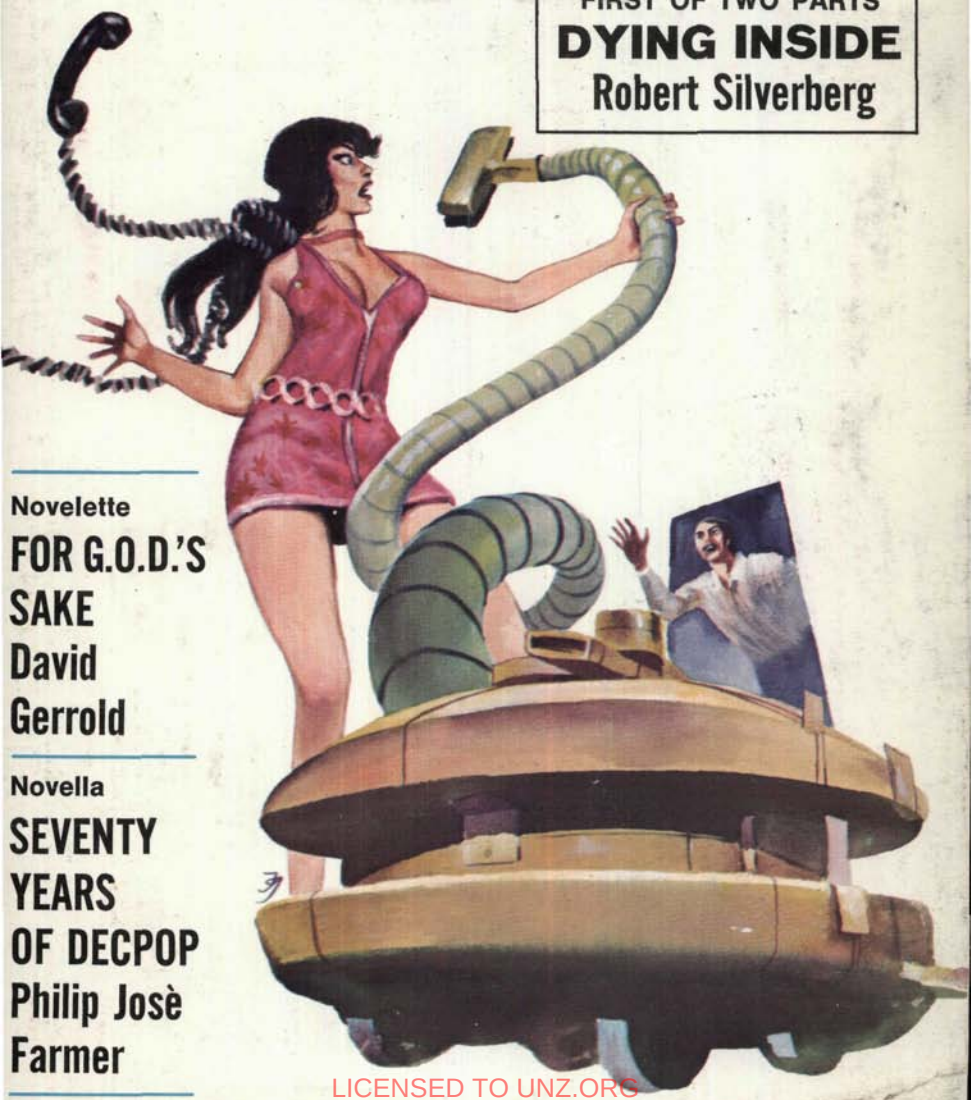
Galaxy

MAGAZINE

FIRST OF TWO PARTS

DYING INSIDE

Robert Silverberg



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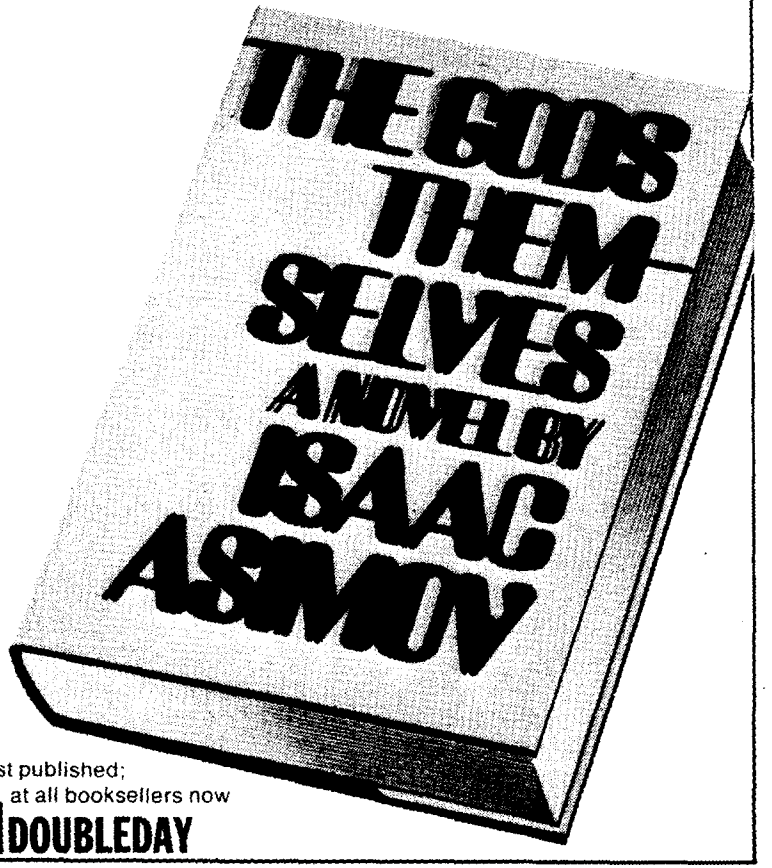

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July-August 1972
Vol. 33, No. 1

Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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EDITOR'S PAGE

Let us today speak of fences.

In the course of a discussion of his latest novel, *Dying Inside*—launched in this issue of *Galaxy*—Robert Silverberg asked me if I had heard of a Finnish science-fiction magazine, *Aikamme*, which had published one of his stories. I had not, until that moment, but the title of the publication translates literally and exactly into *Our Times(s)*—the word is at once singular and plural.

And as the title of a periodical publishing science fiction it would seem to suggest that we live in science-fiction times.

Perhaps we do. Few if any of us survive any given twenty-four hours without being touched by the witch's wand of modern science. According to some estimates human knowledge has been doubling itself every eight years and promises to continue to do so. We carry it with us to the fastest and loneliest wilderness; it reaches us at work and play—and what the physiological and genetic effects have been and will be on Man and his mind we have barely begun to assess.

The above isn't to say that you've met the real-life prototype of David Selig, Bob Silverberg's abortive mind-mutant in *Dying Inside*—but hard evidence may be imminent that he could be around.

Sometimes the endless argument as to what science fiction is finds easy answers. A few short months ago James White's *Dark Inferno*, Isaac Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* and Colin Kapp's *Patterns of Chaos*—all solidly based in hard science and Dr. Asimov's novel exquisitely so—were jostling each other for space on the pages of *Galaxy* and *If*. Since then not one such work has crossed my desk. To your loss and mine.

This essay is not an advocacy of currency or "relevance" in science fiction, or any other fencing in of the medium. In a day when Man has propelled his image beyond galactic bounds (Pioneer 10), when Earth's own limits range from subatomics to the stars—and thence, by definition, beyond time itself—the hard sciences are exotic enough to accommodate virtually all science-fiction disciplines.

But today's science fiction is being written today and I will confess to a profound curiosity as to all that science fiction will say that has not been said—all it will add to what has been said—in a time when the intricate science underlying our technology pervades every breath we take, touches every move we make, anywhere on this globe.

The fences are down—or will be—and we must choose *Directions*.

Cy Chauvin's letter in *Directions* (*Galaxy*, March '72) touched off a flood of replies impossible to contain in one issue. You will find two in the current *Directions*—more to come. Some excerpts:

". . . *science fiction doesn't have a purpose* . . ." Judith M. Hochberg.

". . . *The purpose of sf (is) to outline change* . . ." Charles Gifford, Jr.

". . . *(in) sf insight is the product* . . ." J. R. Yearwood.

Now, if you please, be good enough to turn to page 175.

—JAKOBSSON

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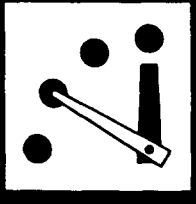

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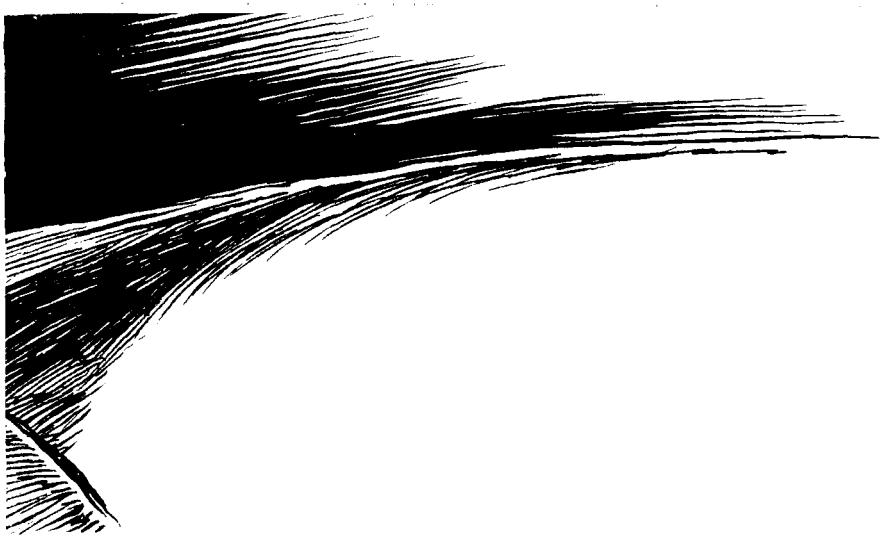

DYING INSIDE

ROBERT SILVERBERG

A mutant, he knew the innermost secrets of all creatures—except himself!

FIRST OF TWO PARTS

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I

SO, THEN, I have to go downtown to the University and forage for dollars again. It doesn't take much cash to keep me going—two hundred a month will do nicely—but I'm running low and I don't dare try to borrow from my sister again. The students will shortly be needing their first term papers of the semester—that's always a steady business. The weary, eroding brain of David Selig is once more for hire. I should be able to pick up seventy-five dollars' worth of work on this lovely golden October morning. The air is crisp and clear. A high-pressure system covers New York City, banishing humidity and haze. In such weather my fading powers still flourish. Let us go then, you and I, when the morning is spread out against the sky.

You and I. To whom do I refer? I'm heading downtown alone, after all. *You and I.*

Why, of course I refer to myself and to that creature who lives within me, spying on unsuspecting mortals. That sneaky monster within me, that ailing monster, dying even more swiftly than I. Let us go then, you and I. Down the hall. Push the button. Into the elevator. There is a stink of garlic in it. My neighbors—they leave their emphatic smells everywhere. I love them. Down. Down.

It is 10:43 A.M., Eastern Daylight Saving Time. The current temperature reading in Central Park is 57°. The humidity stands at 28% and the barometer is 30.30 and falling, with the wind northeast at 11 miles per hour. The forecast is for fair skies and sunny weather today, tonight and tomorrow. David Selig is forty-one and counting. Slightly above medium height, he has the lean figure of a bachelor accustomed to his own meager cooking and his customary facial expression is a mild, puzzled frown. He blinks a lot. In his faded blue denim jacket, heavy-duty boots, and 1969-vintage striped bells he presents a superficially youthful appearance at least from the neck down—but in fact he looks like some sort of refugee from an illicit research laboratory where the balding, furrowed heads of anguished middle-aged men are grafted to the reluctant bodies of adolescent boys. How did this happen to him? At what point did his face and scalp begin to grow old? The dangling cables of the elevator hurl shrieks of mocking laughter at him as he descends from his two-room refuge on the twelfth floor. He wonders if those rusty cables might be even older than he is. He is of the 1935 vintage. This housing project, he suspects, might date from 1933 or 1934. Though perhaps it's younger—just immediately prewar, say. (Do you remember 1940, Duvid? That was the year we took

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you to the World's Fair. This is the trylon, that's the perisphere.) Anyway the buildings are getting old. What isn't?

The elevator halts grindingly at the 7th floor. Even before the scarred door opens I detect a quick mental flutter of female Hispanic vitality dancing through the girders. A young Puerto Rican wife. Sure enough. She is short, swarthy, maybe about twenty-three years old and very pregnant. I can pick up the double neural output clearly: the quicksilver darting of her shallow, sensual mind and the furry, blurry thumpings of the fetus, about six months old, sealed within her hard bulging body. She is flat-faced and broad-hipped, with little glossy eyes and a thin, pinched mouth. A first child, a dirty girl of about two, clutches her mother's thumb. The tot giggles up at me and the woman favors me with a brief, suspicious smile as they enter the elevator.

They stand with their backs toward me. Dense silence. *Buenos dias, señora.* Nice day, isn't it, ma'am? What a lovely little child. But I remain mute. I don't know the woman—she looks like all the others who live in this project and even her cerebral output is standard stuff, unindividuated, indistinguishable: vague thoughts, no doubt, of plantains and rice, this week's lottery results and tonight's television highlights. She is a dull bitch but she is human and I love her. What's her name? Maybe it's Mrs. Altagracia Morales. Mrs. Amantina Figueroa. Mrs. Filomena Mercado. I love their names. Pure poetry. I grew up with plump, clumping girls named Sondra Wiener, Beverly Schwartz, Sheila Weisbard. Ma'am, can you possibly be Mrs. Inocencia Fernandez? Her name comes to me—Esperanza Dominguez. Esperanza. Esperanza. I love you, Esperanza. Ground floor. Nimbly I step forward to hold the door open. The lovely stolid pregnant chiquita doesn't smile at me as she exists.

TO THE subway now, hippity-hop, one long block away. This far uptown the tracks are still elevated. The station at this hour is practically deserted. But in a moment I hear the wailing of onrushing wheels, metal on metal, and simultaneously I pick up the blasting impact of a sudden phalanx of minds all rushing toward me at once out of the north, packed aboard the five or six cars of the oncoming train. The compressed souls of those passengers form a single inchoate mass, pressing insistently against me. They quiver like trembling jellylike bits of plankton squeezed brutally together in some oceanographer's net, creating one complex organism in which the separate identities of all are lost. As the train glides into the station I am able to pick up isolated blurts and squeaks

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of discrete selfhood: a fierce jab of desire, a squawk of hatred, a pang of regret, a sudden purposeful inner mumbling, rising from the confusing totality the way odd little scraps and stabs of melody rise from the murky orchestral smear of a Mahler symphony. The power is deceptively strong in me today. I'm picking up plenty. This is the strongest it's been in weeks. Surely the low humidity is a factor. But I'm not deceived into thinking that the decline in my ability has been checked. When I first began to lose my hair there was a happy period when the process of erosion seemed to halt and reverse itself, when new patches of fine dark floss began to sprout on my denuded forehead. But this was no miraculous reforestation, only a twitch of the hormones, a temporary cessation of decay, not to be relied upon. And in time my hairline resumed its retreat. So, too, in this instance. When one knows that something is dying inside one, one learns not to put much trust in the random vitalities of the fleeting moment. Today the power is strong—tomorrow I may hear nothing but distant tantalizing murmurs.

I find a seat in the corner of the second car, open my book and wait out the ride downtown. I am reading Beckett again, *Malone Dies;* it plays nicely to my prevailing mood, which as you have noticed is one of self-pity.

Somewhere about 180th Street I look up and see a girl sitting diagonally opposite me and apparently studying me. She is in her very early twenties, attractive in a sallow way, with long legs, decent breasts, a bush of auburn hair. Is she interested in me? I am not reading her mind—when I entered the train I automatically stepped my inputs down to the minimum, a trick I learned when I was a child. If I didn't insulate myself against scattershot crowdnoises on trains or in other enclosed public places I couldn't concentrate at all. Without attempting to detect her signals I speculate on what she's thinking about me—I'm playing a game I often play. *How intelligent he looks . . . He must have suffered a good deal—his face is so much older than his body . . . tenderness in his eyes . . . so sad they look . . . a poet, a scholar . . . I bet he's very passionate . . . pouring all his pent-up love into the physical act . . . What's he reading? Beckett? Yes, a poet, a novelist, he must be . . . maybe somebody famous. I mustn't be too aggressive, though. He'll be turned off by pushiness. A shy smile, that'll catch him . . . one thing leads to another . . . I'll invite him up for lunch . . .*

Then, to check on the accuracy of my intuitive perceptions, I tune in on her mind. At first there is no signal. My damnable waning powers are betraying me again.

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But then it comes—static, first, as I get the low-level muzzy ruminations of all the passengers around me, then the clear sweet tone of her soul. She is thinking about a karate class she will attend later this morning on 96th Street. She is in love with her instructor, a brawny pockmarked Japanese. She will see him tonight. Dimly through her mind swims the memory of the taste of sake and the image of his powerful naked body rearing above her. There is nothing in her mind about me. I am simply part of the scenery, like the map of the subway system on the wall above my head. Selig, your egocentricity kills you every time. She does indeed wear a shy smile now, but it is not for me and when she sees me staring at her the smile vanishes abruptly.

THE train treats me to a long sweaty unscheduled halt in the tunnel between stations north of 137th Street—eventually it gets going again and deposits me at 116th Street, Columbia University. I climb toward the sunlight. I first climbed these stairs a full quarter of a century ago, October '51, a terrified high-school senior with acne and a crew-cut, coming out of Brooklyn for my college entrance interview.

I walk along 116th Street. To my right, the broad greensward of South Field—to my left, the shallow steps rising to Low Library. I remember South Field when it was an athletic field in the middle of the campus, brown dirt, basepaths, fence. In my freshman year I played softball there. I was good at softball. Not much muscle, but quick reflexes and a good eye—and I had the advantage of knowing what was on the pitcher's mind. He'd stand there thinking, *This guy's too skinny to hit—I'll give him a high fast one* . . . and I'd be ready for it and bust it out into left field, circling the bases before anyone knew what was happening. Of course it was only softball and my classmates were mostly pudgy dubs who couldn't even run, let alone read minds, but at the time I enjoyed the unfamiliar sensation of being an outstanding athlete. In my sophomore year they ripped up South Field and turned it into a fine grassy showplace divided by a paved promenade, in honor of the University's 200th birthday. Which happened in 1954. Christ, so very long ago.

I go up the steps and take a seat about fifteen feet to the left of the bronze statue of Alma Mater. This is my office in fair weather or foul. The students know where to look for me and when I'm there the word quickly spreads. There are five or six other people who provide the service I provide—impecunious graduate students, mostly, down on their luck—but I'm the quickest and most reliable and I have an enthusiastic following.

"Mr. Selig?"

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Big brawny jock looming above me. Colossal shoulders, chubby innocent face. He's taking Comp Lit 18 and needs a paper fast on the novels of Kafka, which he hasn't read. (This is the football season—he's the starting halfback and he's very, very busy.) I tell him the terms and he hastily agrees. While he stands there I covertly take a reading of him, getting the measure of his intelligence, his probable vocabulary, his style. He's smarter than he appears. Most of them are. They could write their own papers well enough if they only had the time. I make notes, setting down my quick impressions of him, and he goes away happy. Trade is brisk after that. He sends a fraternity brother, the brother sends a friend, the friend sends a brother from a different fraternity—and the daisy-chain lengthens until by early afternoon I find I've taken on all the work I can handle. So all is well. I'll eat regularly for two or three weeks without having to tap my sister's grudging generosity. Judith will be pleased not to hear from me. Home, now, to begin my ghostly tasks. I'm good—glib, earnest, profound in a convincingly sophomoric way—and I can vary my styles. I know my way around literature, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, all the soft subjects. I charge three-fifty a typed page, sometimes more if my probing reveals that the client has money. A minimum grade of B+ guaranteed or there's no fee. I've never had to make a refund.

II

WHEN he was seven and a half years old and causing a great deal of trouble for his third-grade teacher little David was sent to the school psychiatrist, Dr. Hittner, for an examination. The school was an expensive private one on a quiet leafy street in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn. Its orientation was socialist-progressive and the psychiatrist, a specialist in the disturbances of middle-class children, paid a call every Wednesday afternoon. Everyone agreed that David was a brilliant child: he was extraordinarily precocious, with a reading-comprehension score on the twelve-year-old level, and adults found him almost frighteningly bright. But he was uncontrollable in class, raucous, disrespectful. The schoolwork, hopelessly elementary for him, bored him to desperation. His only friends were the class misfits, whom he persecuted cruelly. Most of the children hated him and the teachers feared his unpredictability. One day he had up-ended a hallway fire extinguisher simply to see if it would spray foam as promised. It did. He brought garter snakes to school and let them loose in the auditorium. He mimed

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classmates and even teachers with vicious accuracy.

"Dr. Hittner would just like to have a little chat with you," his mother told him. "He's heard you're a very special boy and he'd like to get to know you better."

David resisted, kicking up a great fuss over the psychiatrist's name. "Hitler? Hitler? I don't want to talk to Hitler!" It was the fall of 1942 and the childish pun was an inevitable one, but he clung to it with irritating stubbornness. "Dr. Hitler wants to see me. Dr. Hitler wants to get to know me."

And his mother said, "No, Duvid, it's *Hittner, Hittner,* with an *n.*"

He went anyway. He strutted into the psychiatrist's office and when Dr. Hittner smiled benignly and said, "Hello, there, David," David shot forth a stiff arm and snapped, *"Heil!"*

Dr. Hittner chuckled. "You've got the wrong man," he said. "I'm *Hittner,* with an *n.*" Perhaps he had heard such jokes before. He was a huge man with a long horsy face, a wide fleshy mouth, a high curving forehead. His skin was soft and pink and he had a good tangy smell. He was trying hard to seem friendly and amused and big-brotherly, but David couldn't help picking up the impression that Dr. Hittner's brotherliness was just an act. It was something he felt with most adults—they smiled a lot, but inside themselves they were thinking

Ballantine Books

***THIS** is the July issue, and presently we shall talk about our May-June books. But actually, for us, it's the depth of winter 1971/72, and we have been desperately trying to get our copy written for next Fall's '72/73 list—the books for which were, in fact, read and bought last summer, '71. And we have just concluded a review of the royalty statements for books published that same summer, purchased up to eighteen months before—say Spring, 1970—and written God knows how long before* that. *The long rhythms of publishing. Writing is a courageous profession. And one that must be carried on continuously, not to say compulsively. Otherwise the whole house of cards falls apart.*

● ● ●

***PUBLISHING** of course is not a profession. It's a madness. Requiring the catch-all charms of gambler, psychiatrist, banker, editor, jailor, tax-consultant, mother, father, merchandiser and entertainer (ever been to a sales conference?) And it is a fall-out point. The publisher is where the buck—good, bad, or non-existent—comes to rest. It's very hard for writers or distributors to believe this. But the fact is, there are no advances, no guarantees for the publisher. He gets to make his first investments in a contract. He waits, and (if he's lucky) the ms. arrives when it should. Most often—about 80% of the time—it's late. Up to twelve years late in the experience of this publisher (and all you guys out there who are currently two or three years late just don't get any ideas). Sometimes the*

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ms. never does come in, or it does and it's a disaster. Soothe and write-off. But let's pretend it's here and it's good, great, glorious (or, with work, it can be made so). Now there is only a year or so to wait until the publisher (lucky fellow) can make his next big investment—actual publication. After that, it's simply a matter of time (about another year) before we all know whether we're rich, famous, or the whole thing remains to be done over again. (And the publisher, naturally, absorbs the returns. . .)

● ● ●

IN THE face of all this anxiety, effort and risk, how any reader can bear not to buy a book is past understanding. Now that you do understand, you know what to do. Therefore, blithe, gallant and indomitable, we are glad to announce that in May we will make available to a by-now desperately waiting public, the following:

DERYNI CHECKMATE, Katherine Kurtz, $1.25. The second volume in the annals of the Deryni—that something more-than-human race. Thought-provoking adventure. No mindless sword carriers here.

● ● ●

IN JUNE the house of Ballantine will bring you, intrepid as always:

SPACE SKIMMER, David Gerrold, 95¢. The first of a series about the "ultimate spaceship." So Dave thinks. What it's really about is people—lost, imperfect, afraid—and fighting their way to one another anyhow. Very, very good.

WITH A FINGER IN MY EYE, David Gerrold, 95¢. Just to show how diverse this very talented young writer can be. Funny, gentle, morbid, joyous—David Gerrold is one of the reasons why publishers go on being publishers. **BB**

things like, *What a scary brat, what a creepy little kid.* Even his mother and father sometimes thought things like that. He didn't understand why adults said one thing with their faces and another with their minds, but he was accustomed to it.

"Let's play some games, shall we?" Dr. Hittner said.

OUT of the vest pocket of his tweed suit he produced a little plastic globe on a metal chain. He showed it to David. Then he pulled on the chain and the globe came apart into eight or nine pieces of different colors. "Watch closely now while I put it back together," said Dr. Hittner. His thick fingers expertly reassembled the globe. Then he pulled it apart again and shoved it across the desk toward David. "Your turn. Can you put it back together, too?"

David remembered that the doctor had started by taking the E-shaped white piece and fitting the D-shaped blue piece into one of its grooves. Then had come the yellow piece, but David didn't recall what to do with it. He sat there a moment, puzzled, until Dr. Hittner obligingly flashed him a mental image of the proper manipulation. David did it and the rest was easy. A couple of times he got stuck, but he was always able to pull the answer out of the doctor's mind. Why does he think he's testing me, David wondered, if he

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keeps giving me so many hints? What's he proving?

"Would you like to keep it?"

"I don't need it," David said. But he pocketed it anyway.

They played a few more games. There was one with little cards about the size of playing cards, with drawings of animals and birds and trees and houses on them. David was supposed to arrange them so that they told a story and then tell the doctor what the story was. He scattered them at random on the desk and made up a story as he went along. "The duck goes into the forest, you see, and he meets a wolf, so he turns into a frog and jumps over the wolf right into the elephant's mouth, only he escapes out of the elephant's tushie and falls into a lake and when he comes out he sees the pretty princess here, who says come home and I'll give you a gingerbread, but he can read her mind and he sees that she's really a wicked witch, who—" Another game involved slips of paper that had big twin inkblots on them.

"Do any of these shapes remind you of real things?"

"Yes," David said, "this is an elephant, see, his tail is here and here all crumpled up—and this is his tushie and this is where he makes pee-pee." He had already discovered that Dr. Hittner became very interested when he talked about tushies or pee-pee, so he gave the doctor plenty to be interested about, finding such things in every inkblot picture. This seemed a very silly game to David, but apparently it was important to Dr. Hittner, who scribbled notes on everything David was saying. David studied Dr. Hittner's mind while the psychiatrist wrote things down. Most of the words he picked up were incomprehensible, but he did recognize a few, the grownup terms for the parts of the body that David's mother had taught him: *penis, vulva, buttocks, rectum*—things like that. Obviously Dr. Hittner liked those words a great deal, so David began to use them. "This is a picture of an eagle that's picking up a little sheep and flying away with it. This is the eagle's penis, down here, and over here is the sheep's rectum. And in the next one there's a man and a woman and they're both naked and the man is trying to . . ." David watched the fountain pen flying over the paper. He grinned at Dr. Hittner and turned to the next inkblot.

Next they played word games. The doctor spoke a word and asked David to say the first word that came into his head. David found it more amusing to say the first word that came into Dr. Hittner's head. It took only a fraction of a second to pick it up and Dr. Hittner didn't seem to notice what was going on.

The game went like this:

"Father."

"Penis."

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"Mother."
"Bed."
"Baby."
"Dead."
"Water."
"Belly."
"Tunnel."
"Shovel."
"Coffin."
"Mother."

Were those the right words to say? Who was the winner in this game? Why did Dr. Hittner seem so upset?

Finally they stopped playing games and simply talked. "You're a very bright little boy," Dr. Hittner said. "I don't have to worry about spoiling you by telling you that, because you know it already. What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"I just want to play and read a lot of books and swim."

"But how will you earn a living?"

"I'll get money from people when I need it."

"If you find out how—I hope you'll tell me the secret," the doctor said. "Are you happy here in school?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"The teachers are too strict. The work is too dumb. The children don't like me."

"Do you ever wonder why they don't like you?"

"Because I'm smarter than they are," David said. "Because I—" Ooops. Almost said it. *Because I can see what they're thinking.* Mustn't ever tell anyone that. Dr. Hittner was waiting for him to finish the sentence. "Because I make a lot of trouble in class."

"And why do you do that, David?"

"I don't know. It gives me something to do, I guess."

"Maybe if you didn't make so much trouble people would like you more. Don't you want people to like you?"

"I don't care. I don't need it."

"Everybody needs friends, David."

"I've got friends."

"Mrs. Fleischer says you don't have very many and that you hit them a lot and make them unhappy. Why do you hit your friends?"

"Because I don't like them. Because they're dumb."

"Then they aren't really friends—if that's how you feel about them."

Shrugging, David said, "I can get along without them. I have fun just being by myself."

"Are you happy at home?"

"I guess so."

"You love your mommy and daddy?"

A pause. A feeling of great tension coming out of the doctor's mind. This is an important question. Give the right answer, David. Give him the answer he wants.

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"Yes," David said.

"Do you ever wish you had a baby brother or sister?"

No hesitation now. "No."

"Really, no? You like being all alone?"

David nodded. "The afternoons are the best time. When I'm home from school and there's nobody around. Am I going to have a baby brother or sister?"

Chuckles from the doctor. "I'm sure I don't know. That would be up to your mommy and daddy, wouldn't it?"

"You won't tell them to get one for me, will you? I mean, you might say to them that it would be good for me to have one and then they'd go and get one, but I really don't want—" I'm in trouble, David realized suddenly.

"What makes you think I'd tell your parents it would be good for you to have a baby brother or sister?" the doctor asked quietly, not smiling now at all.

"I don't know. It was just an idea." Which I found inside your head, Doctor. And now I want to get out of here. I don't want to talk to you any more. "Hey, your name isn't really Hittner, is it? With an *n*? I bet I know your real name. *Heil!*"

III

I NEVER could send my thoughts into anybody else's head. Even when the power was strongest in me I couldn't transmit. I could only receive. Maybe there are people around who do have that power, who can transmit thoughts even to those who don't have any special receiving gift, but I wasn't ever one of them. So right there I was condemned to be society's ugliest toad, the eavesdropper, the voyeur. A kind of leech, secretly sucking emotional vitality from others. A vampire bat. Old English proverb: *He who peeps through a hole may see what will vex him.* Yes. In those years when I was particularly eager to communicate with people I'd work up fearful sweats trying to plant my thoughts in them. I'd sit in a classroom staring at the back of some girl's head and I'd think hard at her: *Hello, Annie, this is David Selig calling—do you read me? Do you read me? I love you, Annie. Over. Over and out.* But Annie never read me and the currents of her mind would roll on like a placid river, undisturbed by the existence of David Selig.

No way, then, for me to speak to other minds, only to spy on them. The way the power manifests itself in me has always been highly variable. I never had much conscious control over it, other than being able to step down the intensity of input and to do a certain amount of fine tuning—basically I had to take whatever came drifting in. Most often I would pick up a per-

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son's surface thoughts, his subvocalizations of the things he would be just about to say. These would come to me in a clear conversational manner, exactly as though he *had* said them, except the tone of voice would be different—plainly not a tone produced by the vocal apparatus. I don't remember any period even in my childhood when I confused spoken communication with mental communication. This ability to read surface thoughts has been fairly consistent throughout—I still can anticipate verbal statements more often than not, especially when I'm with someone who has the habit of rehearsing what he intends to say.

I could also and to some extent still can anticipate immediate intentions, such as the decision to throw a short right jab to the jaw. My way of knowing such things varies. I might pick up a coherent inner verbal statement—*I'm now going to throw a short right jab to his jaw*—or, if the power happens to be working on deeper levels that day, I may simply pick up a series of nonverbal instructions to the muscles, which add up in a fraction of a second to the process of bringing the right arm up for a short jab to the jaw. Call it body language on the telepathic wavelength.

Another thing I've been able to do, though never consistently, is tune in to the deepest layers of the mind—where the soul lives, if you will. Where the consciousness lies bathed in a murky soup of indistinct unconscious phenomena. Here lurk hopes, fears, perceptions, purposes, passions, memories, philosophical positions, moral policies, hungers, sorrows, the whole ragbag accumulation that defines the private self. Ordinarily some of this bleeds through to me even when the most superficial mental contact is established—I can't help getting a certain amount of information about the coloration of the soul. But occasionally—hardly ever, now—I fasten my hooks into the real stuff, the whole person. There's ecstasy in that. There's an electrifying sense of contact. Coupled, of course, with a stabbing, numbing sense of guilt, because of the totality of my voyeurism—how much more of a peeping tom can a person be? Incidentally, the soul speaks a universal language. When I look into the mind of Mrs. Esperanza Dominguez, say, and I get a gabble of Spanish out of it—I don't really know what she's thinking because I don't understand very much Spanish. But if I were to get into the depths of her soul I'd have complete comprehension of anything I picked up. The mind may think in Spanish or Basque or Hungarian or Finnish, but the soul thinks in languageless language accessible to any prying sneaking freak who comes along to peer at its mysteries.

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No matter. It's all going from me now.

Paul F. Bruno
Comp Lit 18, Prof. Schmitz
October 15, 1976

THE NOVELS OF KAFKA

In the nightmare world of *The Trial* and *The Castle* only one thing is certain: that the central figure, significantly known by the initial K, is doomed to frustration. All else is dreamlike and unsure—courtrooms spring up in tenements, mysterious warders devour one's breakfast, a man thought to be Sordini is actually Sortini. The central fact is certain, though: K will fail in his attempt to attain grace.

The two novels have the same theme and approximately the same basic structure. In both K seeks for grace and is led to the final realization that it is to be withheld from him. (*The Castle* is unfinished, but its conclusion seems plain.) Kafka brings his heroes into involvement with their situations in opposite ways. In *The Trial* Joseph K. is passive until he is jolted into the action of the book by the unexpected arrival of the two warders. In *The Castle* K is first shown as an active character making efforts on his own behalf to reach the mysterious Castle. To be sure, though, he has originally been summoned by the Castle—the action did not originate in himself—and thus he began as as passive a character as Joseph K. The distinction is that *The Trial* opens at a point earlier in the time stream of the action—at the earliest possible point, in fact. *The Castle* follows more closely the ancient rule of beginning *in medias res,* with K already summoned and trying to reach the Castle.

Both books get off to rapid starts. Joseph K. is arrested in the very first sentence of *The Trial* and his counterpart K arrives at what he thinks is going to be the last stop before the Castle on the first page of that novel. From there both Ks struggle futilely toward their goals (in *The Castle* simply to get to the top of the hill; in *The Trial,* first to understand the nature of his guilt and then, despairing of this, to achieve acquittal without understanding). Both actually get farther from their goals with each succeeding action. *The Trial* reaches its peak in the wonderful Cathedral scene, quite likely the most terrifying single sequence in any of Kafka's work, in which K is given to realize that he is guilty and can never be acquitted—the

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chapter that follows, describing K's execution, is little more than an anticlimactic appendage. *The Castle,* less complete than *The Trial,* lacks the counterpart of the Cathedral scene (perhaps Kafka was unable to devise one?) and thus is artistically less satisfying than the shorter, more intense, more tightly contructed *Trial.*

Despite their surface artlessness, both novels appear to be built on the fundamental three-part structure of the tragic rhythm labeled by the critic Kenneth Burke as "purpose, passion, perception." *The Trial* follows this scheme with greater success than does the incomplete *Castle*—the purpose, to achieve acquittal, is demonstrated through as harrowing a passion as any fictional hero has undergone. Finally, when Joseph K. has been reduced from his original defiant, self-confident attitude to a fearful, timid state of mind—and he is obviously ready to capitulate to the forces of the Court—the time is at hand for the final moment of perception . . .

That's not so bad. Six double-spaced typed pages. At three-fifty per it earns me a cool twenty-one dollars for less than two hours' work and it will earn the brawny halfback, Mr. Paul F. Bruno, a sure B+ from Professor Schmitz. I'm confident of that because the very same paper, differing only in a few minor stylistic flourishes, got me a B from the very demanding Professor Dupee in May, 1955. Standards are lower today, after two decades of academic inflation. Bruno may even rack up an A- for the Kafka job. It's got just the right quality of earnest intelligence, with the proper undergraduate mixture of sophisticated insight and naive dogmatism. All right, now. Time out for a little chow mein, with maybe a side order of eggroll. Then I'll tackle *Odysseus as a Symbol of Society* or perhaps *Aeschylus and the Aristotelian Tragedy.* I can't work from my own old term papers for those, but they shouldn't be too tough to do. Old typewriter, old humbugger, stand me now and ever in good stead.

IV

ALDOUS HUXLEY thought that evolution had designed our brains to serve as filters, screening out a lot of stuff of no real value to us in our daily struggle for bread. Visions, mystical experiences, psi phenomena such as telepathic messages from other brains—all sorts of things along these lines would forever be flooding into us were it not for the action of what Huxley called, in a little

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book entitled *Heaven and Hell,* "the cerebral reducing valve." Thank God for the cerebral reducing valve! If we hadn't evolved it, we'd be distracted all the time by scenes of incredible beauty, by spiritual insights of overwhelming grandeur and by searing, utterly honest mind-to-mind contact with our fellow human beings. Luckily the workings of the valve protect us—most of us—from such things, and we are free to go about our daily lives, buying cheap and selling dear.

Of course, some of us seem to be born with defective valves. I mean artists like Bosch or El Greco, whose eyes did not see the world as it appears to thee and me—I mean the visionary philosophers, the ecstatics and the nirvana-attainers—I mean the miserable freakish flukes who can read the thoughts of others. Mutants, all of us. Genetic sports.

However, Huxley believed that the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve could be impaired by various artificial means, thus giving ordinary mortals access to the extrasensory data customarily seen only by the chosen few. The psychedelic drugs, he thought, could have this effect. Mescalin, he suggested, interferes with the enzyme system that regulates cerebral function and by so doing "lowers the efficiency of the brain as an instrument for focusing mind on the problems of life on the surface of our planet. This . . . seems to permit the entry into consciousness of certain classes of mental events, which are normally excluded, because they possess no survival value. Similar intrusions of biologically useless, but aesthetically and sometimes spiritually valuable, material may occur as the result of illness or fatigue; or they may be induced by fasting, or a period of confinement in a place of darkness and complete silence."

Speaking for himself, David Selig can say very little about the psychedelic drugs. He had only one experience with them and it wasn't a happy one. That was in the summer of 1968, when he was living with Toni. (You don't know yet who Toni is. Be patient. I'll get to her.)

Though Huxley thought highly of the psychedelics, he didn't see them as the only gateway to visionary experience. Fasting and physical mortification could also get you there. He wrote of mystics who "regularly used upon themselves the whip of knotted leather or even of iron wire. These beatings were the equivalent of fairly extensive surgery without anaesthetics, and their effects on the body chemistry of the penitent were considerable. Large quantities of histamine and adrenalin were released while the whip was actually being plied; and when the resulting wounds began to fester (as wounds practically always did before the age of soap), various toxic sub-

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stances, produced by the decomposition of protein, found their way into the bloodstream. But histamine produces shock, and shock affects the mind no less profoundly than the body. Moreover, large quantities of adrenalin may cause hallucinations, and some of the products of its decomposition are known to induce symptoms resembling those of schizophrenia . . . In other words, when remorse, self-loathing, and the fear of hell release adrenalin, when self-inflicted wounds release decomposed protein into the blood, the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve is lowered and unfamiliar aspects of Mind-at-Large (including psi phenomena, visions, and, if he is philosophically and ethically prepared . . . mystical experiences) will flow into the ascetic's consciousness."

Remorse, self-loathing and the fear of hell. Fasting and prayer. Whips and chains. Festering wounds. As the power fades in me, as the sacred gift dies, I toy with the idea of trying to revive it by artificial means. Acid, mescalin, psilocybin? I don't think I'd care to go there again. Mortification of the flesh? That seems obsolete to me, like marching off to the Crusades or wearing spats: something that simply isn't appropriate for 1976. I doubt that I could get very deep into flagellation, anyway. What does that leave? Fasting and prayer? I could fast, I suppose. Prayer? To whom? To what? I'd feel like a fool. Dear God, give me my power again. Dear Moses please help me. Crap on that. Jews don't pray for favors—they know nobody will answer. What's left, then? Remorse, self-loathing and the fear of hell? I already have those three and they do me no good. We must try some other way of goading the power back to life. Invent something new. Flagellation of the mind, perhaps? Yes. I'll try that. I'll get out the metaphorical cudgels and let myself have it. Flagellation of the aching, weakening, throbbing, dissolving mind. The treacherous, hateful mind.

BUT why does David Selig want his power to come back? Why not let it fade? It's always been a curse to him, hasn't it? It's cut him off from his fellow men and doomed him to a loveless life. Leave well enough alone, Duvid. Let it fade. Let it fade. On the other hand, without the power, what are you? Without that one faltering unpredictable unsatisfactory means of contact with them, how will you be able to touch them at all? Your power joins you to mankind, for better or for worse, in the only joining you have and you can't bear to surrender it. Admit it. You love it and you despise it, this gift of yours. You dread losing it despite all it's done to you. You'll fight to cling to the last shreds of it, even though you

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know the struggle is hopeless. Fight on, then. Read Huxley again. Try acid, if you dare. Try flagellation. Try fasting, at least. All right, fasting. I'll skip the chow mein. I'll skip the eggroll. Let's slide a fresh sheet into the typewriter and think about Odysseus as a symbol of society.

V

HARK to the silvery jangle of the telephone. The hour is late. Who calls? Is it Aldous Huxley from beyond the grave, urging me to have courage? Dr. Hittner, with some important questions about making pee-pee? Sure. Sure. I stare at the telephone, clueless. My power even at its height was never equal to the task of penetrating the consciousness of Ma Bell.

At last, sighing, I pick up the receiver on the fifth ring and hear the sweet contralto voice of my sister Judith.

"Am I interrupting something?" Typical Judith opening.

"A quiet night at home. I'm ghosting a term paper on *The Odyssey*."

"You haven't called in two weeks."

"I was broke. After that scene the last time I didn't want to bring up the subject of money. And lately it's been the only subject I can think of to talk about, so I didn't call."

"Crap," she says. "I wasn't angry at you."

"You sounded mad as hell."

"I didn't mean any of that stuff. Why did you think I was serious? Just because I was yelling? Do you really believe that I regard you as—as—what did I call you?"

"A shiftless sponger, I think."

"A shiftless sponger. Crap. I was tense that night, Duv, I had personal problems and my period was coming on besides. I lost control. I was just shouting the first dumb thing that came into my head, but why did you believe I meant it? You of all people shouldn't have thought I was serious. Since when do you take what people say with their mouths at face value?"

"You were saying it with your head, too, Jude."

"I was?" Her voice is suddenly small and contrite. "Are you sure?"

"It came through loud and clear."

"Oh, Jesus, Duv, have a heart! In the heat of the moment I could have been thinking anything. But underneath the anger—*underneath*, Duv—you must have seen that I didn't mean it. That I love you, that I don't want to drive you away from me. You're all I've got, Duv, you and the baby."

"I don't read much of what's underneath any more, Jude. Not much comes through these days. Anyway, look, it isn't worth hassling over. I *am* a shiftless sponger—and I *have* borrowed more from you than you can afford

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to give. The black sheep big brother feels enough guilt as it is. I'm damned if I'm ever going to ask for money from you again."

"Guilt? You talk about guilt, when I—"

"No," I warn her, "don't you go on a guilt trip now, Jude. Not now."

"All right. All right. Are you okay now for money, though?"

"I told you, I'm ghosting term papers. I'm getting by."

"Do you want to come over here for dinner tomorrow night?"

"I think I'd better work instead. I've got a lot of papers to write, Jude. It's the busy season."

"It would be just the two of us. And the kid, of course, but I'll put him to sleep early. Just you and me. We could talk. We've got so much to talk about. Why don't you come over, Duv? You don't need to work all day and all night. I'll cook up something you like." She is pleading with me, this icy sister who gave me nothing but hatred for twenty-five years. Come over and I'll be a mama for you, Duv. Come let me be loving, brother.

"Maybe the night after next. I'll call you."

"No chance for tomorrow?"

"I don't think so," I say. There is silence. She doesn't want to beg me. Into the sudden screeching silence I say, "What have you been doing with yourself, Judith? Seeing anyone interesting?"

"Not seeing anyone at all." A flinty edge to her voice. She is two and a half years into her divorce—she sleeps around a good deal and juices are souring in her soul. She is thirty-one years old.

"What happened to that travel agent you were seeing? Mickey?"

"Marty. That was just a gimmick. He got me all over Europe for ten percent of the fare. I was using him."

"So?"

"I felt cruddy about it. Last month I broke off. I wasn't in love with him. I don't think I even liked him."

"But you played around with him long enough to get a trip to Europe—first."

"It didn't cost him anything, Duv. I had to go to bed with him—all he had to do was fill out a form. What are you saying anyway? That I'm a whore?"

"Jude—"

"Okay, I'm a whore. At least I'm trying to go straight for a while. Lots of fresh orange juice and plenty of serious reading. I'm reading Proust now, would you believe that? I just finished *Swann's Way* and tomorrow—"

"I've still got some work to do tonight, Jude."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to intrude. Will you come for dinner this week?"

"I'll think about it. I'll let you know."

"Why do you hate me so much, Duv?"

"I don't hate you. And we were

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about to get off the phone, I think."

"Don't forget to call," she says. Clutching at straws.

VI

TONI. I should tell you about Toni now.

I lived with Toni for seven weeks, one summer eight years ago. That's as long as I've ever lived with anybody, except my parents and my sister, whom I got away from as soon as I decently could, and myself, whom I can't get away from at all. Toni was one of the two great loves of my life, the other being Kitty. I'll tell you about Kitty some other time.

Can I reconstruct Toni? Let's try it in a few swift strokes. She was twenty-four that year. A tall coltish girl, five feet six, five feet seven. Slender. Agile and awkward, both at once. Long legs, long arms, thin wrists, thin ankles. Glossy black hair, very straight, cascading to her shoulders. Quick brown eyes, warm, alert and quizzical. A witty, shrewd girl, not really well educated but extraordinarily wise. The face by no means conventionally pretty—too much mouth, too much nose, the cheekbones too high—but producing a sexy and highly attractive effect, sufficient to make a lot of heads turn when she entered a room.

I never looked into Toni's mind except once on the very day I met her and once a couple of weeks after that, plus a third time on the day we broke up. The third time was a sheer disastrous accident. The second was more or less an accident, too, not quite. Only the first was a deliberate probe. After I realized I loved her I took care never to spy on her head. *He who peeps through a hole may see what will vex him.* A lesson I learned very young. Besides, I didn't want Toni to suspect anything about my power. My curse. I was afraid it might frighten her away.

That summer I was working as an eighty-five a week researcher, latest in my infinite series of odd jobs, for a well-known professional writer who was doing an immense book on the political machinations involved in the founding of the state of Israel. Eight hours a day I went through old newspaper files for him in the bowels of the Columbia library. Toni was a junior editor for the publishing house that was bringing out his book. I met her one afternoon in late spring at his posh apartment on East End Avenue. I went there to deliver a bundle of notes on Harry Truman's 1948 campaign speeches and she happened to be present. She was so beautiful it hurt me to look at her. I hadn't been with a woman in months. I automatically assumed she was the writer's mistress—screwing editors, I'm told, is standard practice on certain high levels of the literary profession—but my old peeping-tom instincts

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quickly gave me the true scoop. I tossed a fast probe at him and found that his mind was a cesspool of frustrated longings for her. He ached for her and she had no yen for him at all, evidently. Next I poked into *her* mind. I sank in deep, finding myself in warm, rich loam. Quickly got oriented. Stray fragments of autobiography bombarded me, incoherent, nonlinear: a divorce, some good sex and some bad sex, college days, a trip to the Caribbean, all swimming around in the usual chaotic way. I got past that fast and checked out what I was after. No, she wasn't sleeping with the writer. Physically he registered absolute zero for her. (Odd. To me he seemed attractive, a romantic and appealing figure, as far as a drearily heterosexual soul like me is able to judge such things.) Then, still rummaging around, I learned something much more surprising—I seemed to be turning her on. Forth from her came the explicit line: *I wonder if he's free tonight.* She looked upon the aging researcher, a venerable thirty-three and already going thin on top, and did not find him repellent. I was so shaken by that—her dark-eyed glamor, her leggy sexiness aimed at me—that I got the hell out of her head, fast. "Here's the Truman stuff," I said to my employer. We talked for a few minutes about the next assignment he had for me and then I made as though to leave. A quick guarded look at her.

"Wait," she said. "We can ride down together. I'm just about finished here."

In the elevator we stood apart, Toni in this corner, I in that one, with a quivering wall of tension and yearning separating and uniting us. I had to struggle to keep from reading her. I was afraid, terrified, not of getting the wrong answer but of getting the right one. In the street we stood apart also, dithering a moment. Finally I said I was getting a cab to take me to the Upper West Side—me, a cab, on eighty-five a week—and could I drop her off anywhere? She said she lived on 105th and West End. Close enough. When the cab stopped outside her place she invited me up for a drink. Three rooms, indifferently furnished: mostly books, records, scatter-rugs, posters. She went to pour some wine for us and I caught her and pulled her around and kissed her. She trembled against me—or was I the one who was trembling?

OVER a bowl of hot-and-sour soup at the Great Shanghai, a little later that evening, she said she would be moving in a couple of days. The apartment belonged to her current roommate—male—with whom she had split up just three days before. She had no place to stay. "I've got only one lousy

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room," I said, "but it has a double bed." Shy grins, hers, mine. So she moved in. I didn't think she was in love with me, not at all, but I wasn't going to ask. If what she felt for me wasn't love, it was good enough, the best I could hope for—and in the privacy of my own head I could feel love for her. She had needed a port in a storm. I had happened to offer one. If that was all I meant to her now, so be it. So be it. There was time for things to ripen.

We slept very little, our first two weeks. Not that we were making love all the time, though there was a lot of that, but we *talked*. We were new to each other, which is the best time of any relationship—when there are whole pasts to share everything pours out and there's no need to search for things to say. (Not quite everything poured out. The only thing I concealed from her was the central fact of my life, the fact that had shaped my every aspect.) She talked of her marriage—young, brief and empty—and of how she had lived in the three years since its ending—a succession of men, a dip into occultism and Reichian therapy, a newfound dedication to her editing career. Giddy weeks.

Our third week brought my second peep into her mind. A sweltering June night, a full moon sending cold illumination through the slatted blinds into our room. Her body, very pale, wore a white glow in the eerie darkness, her long lean form rearing above me. Her face half hidden in her own dangling unruly hair. Her eyes closed. Her lips slack. Her breasts, viewed from below, seemed even bigger than they really were. Cleopatra by moonlight. Her beauty and the strangeness of her so overwhelmed me that I could not resist watching her—watching on all levels—and so I opened the barrier that I had so scrupulously erected. My mind touched a curious finger to her soul and received the full uprushing volcanic intensity of her pleasure. I found no thought of me in her mind. Only sheer animal frenzy, bursting from every nerve. I've seen that in other women, before and after Toni—as they reach that moment they are islands, alone in the void of space, aware only of their bodies. When pleasure takes them it is a curiously impersonal phenomenon, no matter how titanic its impact. So it was then with Toni. I didn't object. I knew what to expect and I didn't feel cheated or rejected. In fact my joining of souls with her at that awesome moment served to trigger and treble the intensity of my own pleasure. I lost contact with her then. Upheavals shattered the fragile telepathic link. Afterward I felt a little sleazy at having spied, but not overly guilty about it. How magical a thing it was, after all, to have been with her in that moment. To be aware of her joy not just as mindless spasms but as jolts of brilliant light flaring across the

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dark terrain of her soul. An instant of beauty and wonder, an illumination never to be forgotten. But never to be repeated, either. I resolved once more to keep our relationship clean and honest. To take no unfair advantage of her. To stay out of her head forever after.

Despite which, I found myself some weeks later entering Toni's consciousness a third time. By accident. By damnable abominable accident. Oy, that third time!

That bummer—that disaster.

That catastrophe.

VII

IN THE early spring of 1945, when he was ten years old, his loving mother and father got him a little sister. That was exactly how they phrased it—his mother, smiling her warmest phony smile, hugging him, telling him in her best this - is - how - we - talk - to - bright - children tone, "Dad and I have a wonderful surprise for you, Duvid. We're going to get a little sister for you."

It was no surprise, of course. They had been discussing it among themselves for months, maybe for years, always making the fallacious assumption that their son, clever as he was, didn't understand what they were talking about. And, naturally, he had been reading their minds. In those days the power was sharp and clear—lying in his bedroom, surrounded by his dog-eared books and his stamp albums, he could effortlessly tune in on everything that went on behind the closed door of theirs, fifty feet away. It was like an endless radio broadcast without commercials. They had no secrets from him. He had no shame about spying. Preternaturally adult, privy to all their privities, he meditated daily on the raw torrid stuff of married life—the financial anxieties, the moments of sweet undifferentiated lovingness, the moments of guiltily suppressed hatred for the wearisome eternal spouse, the copulatory joys and anguishes, the comings together and the fallings apart, the intense and terrifyingly single-minded concentration on the growth and proper development of The Child. Their minds poured forth a steady stream of rich yeasty foam and he lapped it all up. Reading their souls was his game, his toy, his religion, his revenge. They never suspected he was doing it. They didn't dream his gift existed. They merely thought he was abnormally intelligent and never questioned the means by which he learned so much about so many improbable things.

He knew that Dr. Hittner—baffled, wholly out of his depth with the strange Selig child—believed it would be better for everyone if David had a sibling. That was the word he used, *sibling,* and David had to fish the meaning out of Hittner's head as though out of a dictionary. Sibling: a brother or a

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sister. Oh, the treacherous horse-faced bastard! The one thing young David had asked Hittner not to suggest—and naturally he had suggested it. The desirability of siblings had been in Hittner's mind all along, lying there like a grenade. David, picking his mother's mind one night, had found the text of a letter from Hittner. *The only child is an emotionally deprived child. Without the rough-and-tumble interplay with siblings he has no way of learning the best techniques of relating to his peers and he develops a dangerously burdensome relation with his parents, for whom he becomes a companion instead of a dependent.* Hittner's universal panacea: lots of siblings. As though there were no neurotics in big families.

David was aware of his parents' frantic attempts at filling Hittner's prescription. No time to waste—the boy grows older all the time, siblingless, lacking each day the means of learning the best techniques of relating to his peers. And so, night after night, the poor aging bodies of Paul and Martha Selig grapple with the problem. They force themselves sweatily onward to self-defeating prodigies of lustfulness and each month the bad news comes in a rush of blood: there will be no sibling this time. But at last the seed takes root. . .

They said nothing about that to him, ashamed, perhaps, to admit to an eight-year-old that such things as sexual intercourse occurred in their lives. But he knew. He knew why his mother's belly was beginning to bulge and why they still hesitated to explain it to him. He knew, too, that his mother's mysterious "appendicitis" attack of July, 1944, was actually a miscarriage. He knew why they both wore tragic faces for months afterward. He knew that Martha's doctor had told her that autumn that it really wasn't wise for her to try for more babies, due to her condition—that if they were going to insist on a second child the best course was to adopt one. He knew his father's traumatic response to that suggestion: *What, bring into the household a bastard that some tramp threw away?* Poor old Paul lay tossing awake every night for weeks, not even confessing to his wife why he was so upset, but unknowingly spilling the whole thing to his nosy son. The insecurities, the irrational hostilities. *Why do I have to raise a stranger's brat, just because this psychiatrist says it'll do David some good? What kind of garbage will I be taking into the house? How can I love this child that isn't mine?* All this the all-perceiving David perceives. Finally the elder Selig voices his misgivings, carefully edited, to his wife, saying, Maybe Hittner's wrong, maybe this is just a phase David's going through and another child isn't the right answer at all. Telling her to consider the expense, the changes

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they'd have to make in their way of life—they're not young, they've grown settled in their ways . . . a child at this time of their lives, the getting up at four in the morning, the crying, the diapers. And David silently cheering his father on, because who needs this intruder, this sibling, this enemy of the peace? But Martha tearfully fights back, quoting Hittner's letter, reading key passages out of her extensive library on child psychology, offering damning statistics on the incidence of neurosis, maladjustment, bed-wetting and homosexuality among only children. The old man yields by Christmas. *Okay, okay, we'll adopt, but let's not take just anything, hear? It's got to be Jewish.*

WINTRY weeks of touring the adoption agencies, pretending all the while to David that these trips to Manhattan are mere innocuous shopping excursions. He wasn't fooled. How could anyone fool this omniscient child? He had only to look behind their foreheads to know that they were shopping for a sibling. His one comfort was the hope that they would fail to find one. This was still wartime—if you couldn't buy a new car, maybe you couldn't get siblings either. For many weeks that appeared to be the case. Not many babies were available, and those that were seemed to have some grave defect—insufficiently Jewish or too fragile-looking, too cranky or of the wrong sex. Some boys were available but Paul and Martha had decided to get David a little sister. Already that limited things considerably, since people tended not to give girls up for adoption as readily as they did boys, but one snowy night in March David detected an ominous note of satisfaction in the mind of his mother, newly returned from yet another shopping trip, and, looking more closely, he realized that the quest was over. She had found a lovely little girl, four months old.

David wondered why Martha hadn't brought the baby home with her that very afternoon, but several weeks of legal formalities lay ahead and April was well along before his mother finally announced, "Dad and I have a wonderful surprise for you, Duvid."

They named her Judith Hannah Selig. David hated her instantly. He had been afraid they were going to move her into his bedroom, but no, they set up her crib in their own room. Nevertheless, her crying filled the whole apartment night after night, unending raucous wails. It was incredible how much noise could come out of one small body. Paul and Martha spent practically all their time feeding her or playing with her or changing her diapers and David didn't mind that very much. It kept them busy and took some of the pressure off him. But he loathed having Judith around.

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He saw nothing cute about her pudgy limbs and curly hair and dimpled cheeks. Watching her while she was being changed, he found some academic interest in observing her little pink slit, so alien to his experience, but once he had seen it his curiosity was assuaged. In general she was an irritating distraction. He couldn't read properly because of the noise she made, and reading was his one pleasure. The apartment was always full of relatives or friends, paying ceremonial visits to the new baby, and their stupid conventional minds flooded the place with blunt thoughts that impinged like mallets on David's vulnerable consciousness. Now and then he tried to read the baby's mind, but there was nothing in it except vague blurry formless globs of cloudy sensation —he had had more rewarding insights reading the minds of dogs and cats. She didn't appear to have any thoughts. All he could pick up were feelings of hunger, of drowsiness and of dim orgasmic release as she wet her diaper.

About ten days after she arrived he decided to try to kill her telepathically. While his parents were busy elsewhere he went to their room, peered into his sister's bassinet and concentrated as hard as he could on draining her unformed mind out of her skull. If only he could manage somehow to suck the spark of intellect from her, to draw her consciousness into himself, to transform her into an empty mindless shell, she would surely die. He sought to sink his hooks into her soul. He stared into her eyes and opened his power wide, taking her entire feeble output and pulling for more. *Come . . . . come . . . . your mind is sliding toward me . . . . I'm getting it, I'm getting all of it . . . . zam! I have your whole mind!* Unmoved by his conjurations, she continued to gurgle and wave her arms about. He stared more intensely, redoubling the vigor of his concentration. Her smile wavered and vanished. Her brows puckered into a frown. Did she know he was attacking her or was she merely bothered by the faces he was making? *Come . . . . come . . . . your mind is sliding toward me. . .*

For a moment he thought he might actually succeed. But then she shot him a look of frosty malevolence, incredibly fierce, truly terrifying coming from an infant, and he backed away, frightened, fearing some sudden counterattack. An instant later she was gurgling again. She had defeated him. He went on hating her, but he never again tried to harm her. She, by the time she was old enough to know what the concept of hatred meant, was well aware of how her brother felt about her. And she hated back. She proved to be a far more efficient hater than he was. Oh, was she ever a first-class expert at hating!

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VIII

THE subject of this composition is My Very First Acid Trip. My first and my last, eight years ago. Actually it wasn't my trip at all, but Toni's. D-lysergic acid diethylamide has never passed through my digestive tract. What I did was hitchhike on Toni's trip. Let me tell you.

This happened in the summer of '68. That summer was a bad trip all in itself. Do you remember '68 at all? That was the year we all awoke to the fact that the whole business was coming apart. I mean American society. That pervasive feeling of decay and imminent collapse, so familiar to us all—it really dates from '68, I think. When the world around us became a metaphor for the process of violent entropic collapse that had been going on inside our souls—inside my soul, at any rate—for some time.

That summer Lyndon Baines Johnson was in the White House, just barely, serving out his time after his abdication in March. Bobby Kennedy had finally met the bullet with his name on it and so had Martin Luther King. It was the year of sideburns and Buffalo Bill mustachios. Babies were dying of malnutrition in a place called Biafra, which you don't remember, and the Russians were moving troops into Czechoslovakia in yet another demonstration of socialist brotherhood. In a place called Vietnam, which you probably wish you didn't remember either, we were dumping napalm on everything in sight for the sake of promoting peace and democracy, and a lieutenant named William Calley had recently coordinated the liquidation of 100-odd sinister and dangerous old men, women and children at the town of Mylai, only we didn't know anything about that yet. Let's see, what else? President Johnson nominated Abe Fortas to replace Earl Warren as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Where are you now, Chief Justice Fortas, when we need you? The Paris peace talks, believe it or not, had just begun that summer. In later years it came to seem that the talks had been going on since the beginning of time, as eternal and everlasting as the Grand Canyon and the Republican Party, but no, they were invented in 1968. That was the sort of year it was. Oh, Christ, I've forgotten one significant chunk of history. In the spring of '68 we had the riots at Columbia, with radical students occupying the campus and classes being suspended and final exams called off and nightly confrontations with the police. How funny it is that I pushed that event out of my mind, when of all the things I've listed here it was the only one I actually experienced at first hand. Standing at Broadway and 116th Street watching platoons of cold-eyed fuzz go racing toward Butler Library. Holding my hand

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aloft in the forked V-for-peace gesture and screaming idiotic slogans with the best of them. Cowering in the lobby of Furnald Hall as the blue-clad nightstick brigade went on its rampage. Debating tactics with a ragged-bearded SDS gauleiter who finally spat in my face and called me a stinking liberal fink. Watching a group of young shaggy Columbia men ritualistically pissing on a pile of research documents that had been liberated from the filing cabinet of some hapless instructor going for his doctorate. It was then that I knew there could be no hope for mankind, when even the best of us were capable of going berserk in the cause of love and peace and human equality. On those dark nights I looked into many minds and found only hysteria and madness. Once, in despair, realizing I was living in a world where two factions of lunatics were battling for control of the asylum, I went off to vomit in Riverside Park after a particularly bloody riot and was caught unawares (me, caught unawares!) by a lithe 14-year-old black mugger who smilingly relieved me of twenty-two dollars.

I was living near Columbia in '68, in a seedy residence hotel on 114th Street, where I had one medium-big room plus kitchen and bathroom privileges. It was cheap—fourteen-fifty a week—and I had to be close to the University because of the work I was doing, researching that Israel book. Are you still following me? I was telling you about my first acid trip, which was really Toni's trip.

WE HAD shared our shabby room nearly seven weeks—a bit of May, all of June, some of July—through thick and thin, heat waves and rainstorms, misunderstandings and reconciliations, and it had been a happy time, perhaps the happiest of my life. I loved her and I think she loved me. I haven't had much love in my life. That isn't intended as a grab for your pity, just as a simple statement of fact, objective and cool. The nature of my condition diminishes my capacity to love and be loved. A man in my circumstances, wide open to everyone's innermost thoughts, really isn't going to experience a great deal of love. He is poor at giving love because he doesn't much trust his fellow human beings—he knows too many of their dirty little secrets and that kills his feelings for them. Unable to give, he cannot get. His soul, hardened by isolation and ungivingness, becomes inaccessible and it is not easy for others to love him. The loop closes upon itself and he is trapped within. Nevertheless I loved Toni, having taken special care not to see too deeply into her, and I didn't doubt my love was returned.

On the Friday of our seventh week Toni came home from her

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office with two small squares of white blotting paper in her purse. In the center of each square was a faint blue-green stain. I studied them a moment or two without comprehending.

"Acid," she said finally.

"Acid?"

"You know. LSD. Teddy gave them to me."

Teddy was her boss, the editor-in-chief. LSD, yes. I knew. I had read Huxley on mescalin in 1957. I was fascinated and tempted. For years I had flirted with the psychedelic experience, even once attempting to volunteer for an LSD research program at the Columbia Medical Center. I was too late signing up, though. And then, as the drug became a fad, came all the horror stories of suicides, psychoses, bad trips. Knowing my vulnerabilities, I decided it was the part of wisdom to leave acid to others, though I was still curious about it. And now these squares of blotting paper sitting in the palm of Toni's hand.

"It's supposed to be dynamite stuff," she said. "Absolutely pure, laboratory quality. Teddy's already tripped on a tab from this batch and he says it's very smooth, very clean, no speed in it or any crap like that. I thought we could spend tomorrow tripping and sleep it off on Sunday."

"Both of us?"

"Why not?"

"Do you think it's safe for both of us to be out of our minds at the same time?"

She gave me a peculiar look. "Do you think acid drives you out of your mind?"

"I don't know. I've heard a lot of scary stories."

"You've never tripped?"

"No," I said. "Have you?"

"Well, no. But I've watched friends of mine while they were tripping." I felt a pang at this reminder of the life she had led before I met her. "They don't go out of their minds, David. There's a kind of wild high for an hour or so when things sometimes get jumbled up, but basically somebody who's tripping sits there as lucid and as calm as—well, Aldous Huxley. Can you imagine Huxley out of his mind? Gibbering and drooling and smashing furniture?" She sounded impatient with me. There was a patronizing, lecturing tone in her voice. Her esteem for me seemed clearly diminished by these old-maid hesitations of mine—we were on the threshold of a real rift. "What's the matter, David? Are you afraid to trip?"

"I think it's unwise for both of us to trip at once, that's all. When we aren't sure where the stuff is going to take us."

"Tripping together is the most loving thing two people can do."

"But it's a risky thing. We just don't know. Look, you can get more acid if you want it, can't you?"

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"I suppose so."

"Okay, then. Let's do this thing in an orderly way, one step at a time. There's no hurry. You trip tomorrow and I'll watch. I'll trip on Sunday and you'll watch. If we both like what the acid does to our heads, we can trip together next time. All right, Toni? All right?"

"All right," she said softly. "It isn't worth a hassle."

SATURDAY morning she skipped breakfast—she had been told to trip on an empty stomach—and after I had eaten we sat for a time in the kitchen with one of the squares of blotting paper lying innocently on the table between us. There wasn't much conversation. She filled an ash tray with a great dismal mound of half-smoked cigarettes. From time to time she grinned nervously. From time to time I took her hand and smiled encouragingly. During this touching scene various of the tenants with whom we shared the kitchen on this floor of the hotel drifted in and out. First Eloise, the sleek black hooker. Then Miss Theotokis, the grim-faced nurse who worked at St. Luke's. Mr. Wong, the mysterious little roly-poly Chinese who always walked around in his underwear. Aitken, the scholarly fag from Toledo, and his cadaverous mainlining roommate, Donaldson. A couple of them nodded to us but no one actually said anything, not even "Good morning." In this place it was proper to behave as though your neighbors were invisible. The fine old New York tradition. About half-past ten in the morning Toni said, "Get me some orange juice, will you?" Giving me a wink and a broad toothy smile, all false bravado, she wadded up the blotting paper and pushed it into her mouth, bolting it and gulping the orange juice as a chaser.

"How long will it take to hit?" I asked.

"About an hour and a half," she said.

In fact it was more like fifty minutes. We were back in our own room, the door locked, faint scratchy sounds of Bach coming from the portable phonograph. She looked up suddenly and said, "I'm starting to feel a little funny."

"Funny how?"

"Dizzy. A slight touch of nausea. There's a prickling at the back of my neck."

"Can I get you anything? Glass of water? Juice?"

"Nothing, thanks. I'm fine. Really I am." A smile, timid but genuine. She seemed a little apprehensive but not at all frightened. Eager for the voyage. I put down my book and watched her vigilantly, feeling protective, almost wishing that I'd have some occasion to be of service to her. I didn't want her to have a bad trip but I wanted her to need me.

She gave me bulletins on the

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progress of the acid through her nervous system. Visual effects were beginning. The walls looked a trifle concave to her and the flaws in the plaster were taking on extraordinary texture and complexity. The color of everything was unnaturally bright. The shafts of sunlight coming through the dirty window were prismatic, shattering and spewing pieces of the spectrum over the floor. The music—I had a stack of her favorite records on the changer—had acquired a curious new intensity. She was having difficulty following melodic lines and it seemed to her that the turntable kept stopping and starting, but the sound itself, as sound, had some indescribable quality of density and tangibility that fascinated her. There was a whistling sound in her ears, too, as of air rushing past her cheeks. She spoke of a pervading sense of strangeness—"I'm on some other planet," she said twice. She looked flushed, excited, happy. Remembering the terrible tales I had heard of acid-induced descents into hell, harrowing accounts of grueling bummers lovingly recounted for the delight of the millions by the diligent anonymous journalists of *Time* and *Life*, I nearly wept in relief at this evidence that my Toni would come through her journey unscathed. I had feared the worst. But she was making out all right. Her eyes were closed. Her face was serene and exultant, her breathing deep and relaxed. Lost in transcendental realms of mystery was my Toni. She was barely speaking to me now, breaking her silences only every few minutes to murmur something indistinct and oblique. Half an hour had passed since she first had reported strange sensations. As she drifted deeper into her trip my love for her grew deeper also. Her ability to cope with acid was proof of the basic toughness of her personality and that delighted me. I admire capable women. Already I was planning my own trip for the next day—selecting the musical accompaniment, trying to imagine the sort of interesting distortions of reality I would experience, looking forward to comparing notes with Toni afterward. I was regretting the cowardice that had deprived me of the pleasure of tripping with Toni this day.

BUT what is this, now? What's happening to my head? Why this sudden feeling of suffocation? The pounding in my chest? The dryness in my throat? The walls are flexing—the air seems close and heavy—my right arm is suddenly a foot longer than the left one. These are effects Toni had noticed and described a little while ago. Why do I feel them now? I tremble. Muscles leap about of their own accord in my thighs. Is this what they call a contact high? Merely being so close to Toni while

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she trips—did she breathe particles of LSD at me? Have I inadvertently turned on through some contagion of the atmosphere?

"My dear Selig," says my armchair smugly, "how can you be so foolish? Obviously you're picking these phenomena right out of her mind!"

Obviously? Is it so obvious? I consider the possibility. Am I reading Toni without knowing it? Apparently I am. In the past some effort of concentration, however slight, had always been necessary in order for me to manage a fine-focus peep into another head. But it seems that the acid must intensify her outputs and bring them to me unsolicited. What other explanation can there be? She is broadcasting her trip and somehow I have tuned to her wavelength. And now the acid's strangenesses, spreading across the gap between us, infect me as well.

Shall I get out of her mind?

The acid effects distract me. I look at Toni and she seems transformed. A small dark mole on her lower cheek, near the corner of her mouth, flashes a vortex of blazing color: red, blue, violet, green. Her lips are too full, her mouth too wide. All those teeth. Row upon row upon row, like a shark's. Why have I never noticed that predatory mouth before? She frightens me. Her neck elongates; her body compresses; her breasts move about like restless cats beneath her familiar red sweater, which itself has taken on an ominous, threatening purplish tinge. To escape her I glance toward the window. A pattern of cracks that I have never been aware of before runs through the soiled panes. In a moment, surely, the shattered window will implode and shower us with fiery fragments of glass. The building across the street is unnaturally squat today. There is menace in its altered form. The ceiling is coming toward me, too. I hear muffled drumbeats overhead—the footsteps of my upstairs neighbor, I tell myself—and I imagine cannibals preparing their dinner.

I should turn this off, before it freaks me altogether. I want out.

Well, easily done. I have my ways of stopping down the inputs, of blocking the flow. Only they don't work this time. I am helpless before the power of the acid. I try to shut myself away from these unfamiliar and unsettling sensations and they march into me all the same. I am wide open to everything emanating from Toni. I am caught up in it. I go deeper and deeper. This is a trip. This is a bad trip. This is a very bad trip. How odd—Toni was having a good trip, wasn't she? Then why do I, accidentally hitchhiking on her trip, find myself having a bad one?

Whatever is in Toni's mind floods into mine. Receiving another's soul is no new experience for me, but this is a transfer such as I have

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never had before, for the information, modulated by the drug, comes to me in ghastly distortions. I am an unwilling spectator in Toni's soul and what I see is a feast of demons. Can such darkness really live within her? I saw nothing like this those other two times—has the acid released some level of nightmare not accessible to me before? Her past is on parade. Gaudy images, bathed in a lurid light. Lovers. Copulations. Abominations. Where am I? Where am I? Ah, there—off to one side, insignificant, irrelevant. Is that thing me? Is that how she really sees me? A hairy vampire bat, a crouching huddled bloodsucker? Or is that merely David Selig's own image of David Selig, bouncing between us like the reflections in a barber shop's parallel mirrors? God help me, am I laying my own bad trip on her, then reading it back from her and blaming her for harboring nightmares not of her own making?

How can I break this link?

I stumble to my feet. Staggering, splay-footed, nauseated. The room whirls. Where is the door? The doorknob retreats from me. I lunge for it.

"David?" Her voice reverberates unendingly. "David David David David David David—"

"Some fresh air," I mutter. "Just stepping outside a minute—"

It does no good. The nightmare images pursue me through the door. I lean against the sweating wall, clinging to a flickering sconce. The Chinaman drifts by me as though a ghost. Far away I hear the telephone ringing. The refrigerator door slams and slams again and slams again and the Chinaman goes by me a second time from the same direction and the doorknob retreats from me as the universe folds back upon itself, locking me into a looped moment. Entropy decreases. The green wall sweats green blood. A voice like thistles says, "Selig? Is something wrong?" It's Donaldson, the junkie. His face is a skull's face. His hand on my shoulder is all bones. "Are you sick?" he asks. I shake my head. He leans toward me until his empty eye sockets are inches from my face and studies me a long moment. He says, "You're *tripping*, man! Isn't that right? Listen, if you're freaking out come on down the hall—we've got some stuff that might help you."

"No. No problem."

I go lurching into my room. The door, suddenly flexible, will not close; I push it with both hands, holding it in place until the latch clicks. Toni is sitting where I left her. She looks baffled. Her face is a monstrous thing, pure Picasso. I turn away from her, dismayed.

"David?"

HER voice is cracked and harsh and seems to be pitched in two octaves at once, with a filling of scratchy wool between

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the top tone and the bottom. I wave my hands frantically, trying to get her to stop talking, but she goes on, expressing concern for me, wanting to know what's happening, why I've been running in and out of the room. Every sound she makes is torment for me. Nor do the images cease to flow from her mind to mine. That shaggy toothy bat, wearing my face, still glowers in a corner of her skull. Toni, I thought you loved me. Toni, I thought I made you happy. I drop to my knees and explore the dirt-encrusted carpet, a million years old, a faded thinning threadbare piece of the Pleistocene. She comes to me, bending down solicitously, she who is tripping looking after the welfare of her untripping companion, who mysteriously is tripping also. "I don't understand," she whispers. "You're crying, David. Your face is all blotchy. Did I say something wrong? Please don't carry on, David. I was having such a good trip and now—I just don't understand—"

The bat. The bat. Spreading its rubbery wings. Baring its yellow fangs.

Biting. Sucking. Drinking.

I choke out a few words: "I'm—tripping—too—"

My face pushed against the carpet. The smell of dust in my dry nostrils. Trilobites crawling through my brain. A bat crawling through hers. Shrill laughter in the hallway. The telephone. The refrigerator door: slam, slam, slam! The cannibals dancing upstairs. The ceiling pressing against my back. My hungry mind looting Toni's soul. He who peeps through a hole may see what will vex him. Toni says, "You took the other acid? When?"

"I didn't."

"Then how can you be tripping?"

I make no reply. I crouch, I huddle, I sweat, I moan. This is the descent into hell. Huxley warned me. I didn't want Toni's trip. I didn't ask to see any of this. My defenses are destroyed now. She overwhelms me. She engulfs me.

Toni says, "Are you reading my mind, David?"

"Yes." The miserable ultimate confession. "I'm reading your mind."

"What did you say?"

"I said I'm reading your mind. I can see every thought. Every experience. I see myself the way you see me. Oh, Christ, Toni, Toni, Toni, it's so awful!"

She tugs at me and tries to pull me up to look at her. Finally I rise. Her face is horribly pale. Her eyes are rigid. She asks for clarification. What's this about reading minds? Did I really say it, or is it something her acid-blurred mind invented? I really said it, I tell her. You asked me if I was reading your mind and I said yes, I was.

"I never asked any such thing," she says.

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"I heard you ask it."

"But I didn't—" Trembling, now. Both of us. Her voice is bleak. "You're trying to bum-trip me, aren't you, David? I don't understand. Why would you want to hurt me? Why are you messing me up? It was a good trip. *It was a good trip.*"

"Not for me," I say.

"You weren't tripping."

"But I was."

She gives me a look of total incomprehension and pulls away from me and throws herself on the bed, sobbing. Out of her mind, cutting through the grotesqueries of the acid images, comes a blast of raw emotion—fear, resentment, pain, anger. She thinks I've deliberately tried to injure her. Nothing I can say now will repair things. Nothing can ever repair things. She despises me. I am a vampire to her, a bloodsucker, a leech—she knows my gift for what it is. We have crossed some fatal threshold and she will never again think of me without anguish and shame. Nor I of her. I rush from the room, down the hall to the room shared by Donaldson and Aitken. "Bad trip," I mutter. "Sorry to trouble you, but—"

I STAYED with them the rest of the afternoon. They gave me a tranquilizer and brought me gently through the downslope of the trip. The psychedelic images still came to me out of Toni for half an hour or so, as though an inexorable umbilical chain linked us across all the length of the hallway. But then to my relief the sense of contact began to slip and fade and suddenly, with a kind of audible click at the moment of severance, it was gone altogether. The flamboyant phantoms ceased to vex my soul. Color and dimension and texture returned to their proper states. And at last I was free from that merciless reflected self-image. Once I was fully alone in my own skull again I felt like weeping to celebrate my deliverance, but no tears would come and I sat passively, sipping a Bromo. Time trickled away. Eventually I felt better. Shortly before six o'clock I went back to my room. Toni was not there. The place seemed oddly altered. Books were gone from the shelves, prints from the walls. The closet door stood open and half the things in it were missing. In my befuddled, fatigued state it took me a moment or two to grasp what had happened. At first I imagined burglary, abduction, but then I saw the truth. She had moved out.

IX

TODAY there is a hint of encroaching winter in the air: it takes tentative nips at the cheeks. October is dying too quickly. The sky is mottled and unhealthy

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looking, cluttered by sad, heavy, low-hanging clouds. Yesterday it rained, skinning yellow leaves from the trees, and now they lie pasted to the pavement of College Walk, their tips fluttering raggedly in the harsh breeze. There are puddles everywhere. As I settle down beside Alma Mater's massive green form I primly spread newspaper sheets, selected portions of today's issue of *The Columbia Daily Spectator,* over the cold damp stone steps. Twenty-odd years ago, when I was a foolishly ambitious sophomore dreaming of a career in journalism—how sly, a reporter who reads minds!—*Spec* seemed central to my life. Now it serves only for keeping my rump dry.

Here I sit. Office hours. On my knees rests a thick manila folder, held closed by a big rubber band. Within, neatly typed, are five term papers, the products of my busy week. *The Novels of Kafka. Shaw as Tragedian. The Concept of Synthetic A Priori Statements. Odysseus as a Symbol of Society. Aeschylus and the Aristotelian Tragedy.* This is the day appointed for delivering the goods and, perhaps, picking up some new assignments. Five minutes to eleven. My clients will be arriving soon. Meanwhile I scan the passing parade. Students hurrying by, clutching mounds of books. Hair rippling in the wind, breasts bobbling. They all look frighteningly young to me, even the bearded ones.

To divert myself I try to touch the minds of passersby and learn what I can learn. Playing my old game, my only game. Selig the voyeur, the soul-vampire, ripping off the intimacies of innocent strangers to cheer his chilly heart. But no—my head is full of cotton today. Only muffled murmurs come to me, indistinct, content-free. No discrete words, no flashes of identity, no visions of soul's essence. This is one of the bad days. All inputs converge into unintelligibility—each bit of information is identical to all others. It is the triumph of entropy. I am reminded of Forster's Mrs. Moore, listening tensely for revelation in the echoing Marabar caves and hearing only the same monotonous noise, the same meaningless all-dissolving sound: *Boum.* The sum and essence of mankind's earnest strivings: *Boum.* The minds flashing past me on College Walk now give me only: *Boum.* Perhaps it is all I deserve. Love, fear, faith, churlishness, hunger, self-satisfaction, every species of interior monolog, all come to me with identical content. *Boum.* I must work to correct this. It is not too late to wage war against entropy. Gradually, sweating, struggling, scrabbling for solid purchase, I widen the aperture, coaxing my perceptions to function. Yes. Yes. Come back to life. Get

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it up, you miserable spy! Give me my fix! Within me the power stirs. The inner murk clears a bit—stray scraps of isolated but coherent thought find their way into me. This scratchy chaotic chatter tells me nothing except that the power is not yet dead and I take comfort enough in that. I visualize the power as a sort of worm wrapped around my cerebrum, a poor tired worm, wrinkled and shrunken, its once-glossy skin now ulcerous with shabby, flaking patches. That is a relatively recent image, but even in happier days I always thought of the gift as something apart from myself, something intrusive. An inhabitant. It and me, me and it. I used to discuss such things with Nyquist. (A person I once knew, a certain Tom Nyquist, a former friend of mine. Who carried a somewhat similar intruder within his skull.) Nyquist didn't like my outlook. "That's schizoid, man, setting up a duality like that. Your power is you. You are your power. Why try to alienate yourself from your own brain?" Probably Nyquist was right, but it's much too late. It and me is how it will be, till death do us part.

HERE is my client, the bulky halfback, Paul F. Bruno. His face is swollen and purpled and he is unsmiling, as though Saturday's heroics have cost him some teeth. I flip down the rubber band, extract *The Novels of Kafka* and offer the paper to him. "Six pages," I say. He has given me a ten-dollar advance. "You owe me another eleven bucks. Do you want to read it first?"

"How good it it?"

"You won't be sorry."

"I'll take your word for it." He manages a painful, closemouthed grin. Pulling forth his thick wallet, he crosses my palm with greenbacks. I pocket his money. He favors me with a curt nod and tucks *The Novels of Kafka* under his immense forearm. Hastily, in shame, he goes hustling down the steps and off in the direction of Hamilton Hall. I watch his broad retreating back. A sudden gust of malevolent wind, rising off the Hudson, comes knifing eastward and cuts me bone-deep.

Bruno has paused at the sundial, where a slender black student close to seven feet tall his intercepted him. A basketball player, obviously. The black wears a blue varsity jacket, green sneakers and tight tubular yellow slacks. His legs alone seem five feet long. He and Bruno talk for a moment. Bruno points toward me. The black nods. I am about to gain a new client, I realize. Bruno vanishes and the black trots springlegged across the walk, up the steps. He is very dark, almost purple-skinned, yet his features have a Caucasian sharpness, fierce cheekbones, proud aquiline nose,

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thin frosty lips. He is formidably handsome, some kind of walking statuary. He wears his midnight mass of kinky hair in a vast aggressive Afro halo a foot in diameter or more, fastidiously trimmed. I would not have been surprised by scarified cheeks, a bone through the nostrils. As he nears me my mind, barely slit-wide, picks up peripheral generalized emanations of his personality. Everything is predictable, even stereotyped—I expect him to be touchy, cocky, defensive, hostile, and what comes to me is a bouillabaisse of ferocious racial pride, overwhelming physical self-satisfaction, explosive mistrust of others—especially whites. All right. Familiar patterns.

His elongated shadow falls suddenly upon me as the sun momentarily pierces the clouds. He sways bouncily on the balls of his feet. "Your name Selig?" he asks. I nod. "Yahya Lumumba," he says.

"Pardon me?"

"*Yahya Lumumba.*" His eyes, glossy white against glossy purple, blaze with fury. From the impatience of his tone I realize that he is telling me his name, or at least the name he prefers to use. His tone indicates also that he assumes it's a name everyone on this campus will recognize. Well, what would I know of college basketball stars? He says, "I hear you do term papers, man."

"That's right."

"You got a good recommend from my pal Bruno there. How much you charge?"

"Three-fifty a page. Typed, double-spaced."

He considers it. He shows many teeth and says, "What kind of rip-off is that?"

"It's how I earn my living, Mr. Lumumba." I hate myself for that toadying, cowardly *mister*. "That's about twenty dollars for an average-length paper. A decent job takes a fair amount of time, right?"

"Yeah. Yeah." An elaborate shrug. "Okay, I'm not hassling you, man. I got need for your work. You know anything about Europydes?"

"Euripides?"

"That's what I said." He's baiting me, coming on with exaggerated black mannerisms, talking watermelon-nigger at me with his *Europydes*. "That Greek cat who wrote plays."

"I know who you mean. What sort of paper do you need, Mr. Lumumba?"

He pulls a scrap of a notebook sheet from a breast pocket and makes a great show of consulting it. "The prof he want us to compare the 'Electra' theme in Europydes, Sophocles and Eesk—Aysk—"

"Aeschylus?"

"Him, yeah. Five to ten pages. It due by November ten. Can you swing it?"

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"I THINK so," I say, reaching for my pen. "It shouldn't be any trouble at all. I'll need some information about you for the heading. Exact spelling of your name, the name of your professor, the course number—" He starts to tell me these things. As I jot them down I simultaneously open the aperture of my mind for my customary scan of the client's interior, to give me some idea of the proper tone to use in the paper. Will I be able to do a convincing job of faking the kind of essay Yahya Lumumba is likely to turn in? It will be a taxing technical challenge if I have to write in black hipster jargon, coming on all cool, jazzy and snotty, every line laughing in the ofay prof's fat face. I imagine I could do it—but does Lumumba want me to? Will he thank I'm mocking *him* if I adopt the jiveass style and seem to be putting him on as he might put on the prof? I must know these things. So I slip my snaky tendrils past his woolly scalp into the hidden gray jelly. Hello, big black man. Entering, I pick up a somewhat more immediate and vivid version of the generalized persona he constantly projects--the hyped-up black pride, the mistrust of the paleface stranger, the chuckling enjoyment of his own lean long-legged muscular frame. But these are mere residual attitudes, the standard furniture of his mind. I have not yet reached the level of this-minute thought. I have not penetrated to the essential Yahya Lumumba, the unique individual whose style I must assume. I push deeper. As I sink in I sense a distinct warming of the psychic temperature, an outflow of heat, comparable perhaps to what a miner might experience five miles down, tunneling toward the magmatic fires at Earth's core. This man Lumumba is constantly boiling within, I realize. The glow from his tumultuous soul warns me to be careful, but I have not yet gained the information I seek and so I go onward, until abruptly the molten frenzy of his stream of consciousness hits me with terrible force. *Christ I hate the little bald mother conning me three-fifty a page I ought to bust his teeth pick him up throw him into the trash what if I wrote the paper myself show him that the black man can think too the Jew isn't the only one with a brain but I can't I can't that's the whole trouble mom I can't Europydes Sophocles Eeskilus who knows shit about them they don't teach that crap on Lenox Avenue I got other stuff on my mind the Rutgers game one-on-one down the court gimme the ball that's it and it's up and in for Lumumba! and wait folks he was fouled in the act of shooting now he goes to the line big confident easy six feet ten inches tall holder of every Columbia scoring record bounces the ball once twice*

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up, swish! Lumumba on his way to another big evening tonight folks Europydes Sophocles Eeskilus why do I have to know anything about them write anything about them what good is it to a black man four hundred years of slavery we got other stuff on our minds what do any of them know especially this mother here I got to pay him twenty bucks to do something I'm not good enough to do for myself who says I have to what good is any of it why why why why.

A roaring furnace. The heat is overwhelming. I've been in contact with intense minds before, far more intense even than this one, but that was when I was younger, stronger, more resilient. I can't handle this volcanic blast. The force of his contempt for me is magnified factorially by the force of the self-contempt that needing my services makes him feel. He is a pillar of hatred. And my poor enfeebled power can't take it. Some sort of automatic safety device cuts in to protect me from an overload: the mental receptors shut themselves down. This is a new experience for me, a strange one, this load-shedding phenomenon. It is as though limbs are dropping off, ears, balls, anything disposable, leaving nothing but a smooth torso. The inputs fall away—the mind of Yahya Lumumba retreats and is inaccessible to me and I find myself involuntarily reversing the process of penetration until I can feel only his most superficial emanations. Then not even those, only a gray furry exudation marking the mere presence of him alongside me. All is indistinct. All is muffled. *Boum.* We are back to that again. There is a ringing in my ears—it is an artifact of the sudden silence, a silence loud as thunder. A new stage on my downward path. Never have I lost my grip and slipped from a mind like this. I look up, dazed, shattered. Yahya Lumumba's thin lips are tightly compressed. He stares down at me in distaste, having no inkling of what has occurred.

I say faintly, "I'd like ten dollars now in advance. The rest you pay when I deliver the paper."

He tells me coldly that he has no money to give me today. His next check from the scholarship fund isn't due until the beginning of the coming month. I'll just have to do the job on faith, he says. You can take it or leave it, man.

"Can you manage five?" I ask. "As a binder. Faith isn't enough. I have expenses." He glares. He draws himself to his full height; he seems nine or ten feet tall. Without a word he takes a five-dollar bill from his wallet, crumples it, scornfully tosses it into my lap. "I'll see you here the morning of November ninth," I call after him as he stalks away. Europydes, Sophocles, Eeskilus. I sit stunned,

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shivering, listening to the bellowing silence. *Boum. Boum. Boum.*

X

IN HIS more flamboyantly Dostoyevskian moments, David Selig liked to think of his power as a curse, a savage penalty for some unimaginable sin. Certainly his special ability had caused a lot of trouble for him, but in his saner moments he knew that calling it a curse was sheer self-indulgent melodrama. The power was a divine gift. The power brought ecstasy. Without the power he was nothing; with it he was a god. Is that a curse? Is that so terrible? Something funny happens when gamete meets gamete and destiny cries, Here, Selig-baby—be a god! This you would spurn? Don't kid yourself, Duvid: no matter how badly the telepathy stuff messed you up, and it messed you up pretty badly, you wouldn't have done without it for a minute. Because the power brought ecstasy.

The power brought ecstasy. That's it in a single crisp phrase. Mortals are born into a vale of tears and they get their kicks wherever they can. Some, seeking pleasure, are compelled to turn to sex, drugs, booze, television, movies, pinochle, the stock market, the racetrack, the roulette wheel, whips and chains, collecting first editions, Caribbean cruises, Chinese snuff bottles, rubber garments, whatever. Not him, not the accursed David Selig. All he had to do was sit quietly with his apparatus wide open and drink in the thought waves drifting on the telepathic breeze. With the greatest of ease he lived a hundred vicarious lives. He heaped his treasure house with the plunder of a thousand souls. Ecstasy. Of course, the ecstatic part was all quite some time ago.

The best years were those between ages of fourteen and twenty-five. Younger, and he was still too naive, too unformed, to wring much appreciation from the data he took in. Older, and his growing bitterness, his sour sense of isolation, damped his capacity for joy. Fourteen to twenty-five, though. The golden years. Ah!

It was so very much more vivid then. Life was like a waking dream. There were no walls in his world—he could go anywhere and see anything. The intense flavor of existence. Steeped in the rich juices of perception. Not until Selig was past forty did he realize how much he had lost, over the years, in the way of fine focus and depth of field. The power had not begun detectably to dim until he was well along in his thirties, but it obviously must have been fading by easy stages all through his manhood, dwindling so gradually that he remained unaware of the cumulative loss. The change had been absolute, qualitative rather than quantitative.

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Even on a good day, now, the inputs did not begin to approach the intensity of those he remembered from his adolescence. In those remote years the power had brought him not only bits of subcranial conversation and scattered snatches of soul, as now, but also a gaudy universe of colors, textures, scents, densities—the world through an infinity of other sensory intakes, the world captured and played out for his delight on the glassy radiant spherical screen within his mind.

FOR instance. He lies propped against an itchy August haystack in a hot Brueghelesque landscape, shortly past noon. This is 1950 and he hangs becalmed midway between his fifteenth birthday and his sixteenth. Some sound effects, Maestro: *Beethoven's Sixth,* bubbling up gently, sweet flutes and playful piccolos. The sun dangles in a cloudless sky. A gentle wind stirs the willows bordering the cornfield. The young corn trembles. The brook burbles. A starling circles overhead. He hears crickets. He hears the drone of a mosquito, and watches calmly as it zeroes in on his bare, hairless, sweat-shiny chest. His feet are bare, too—he wears only tight, faded blue jeans. City boy, digging the country.

The farm is in the Catskills, twelve miles north of Ellenville. It is owned by the Schieles, a tribe of tawny Teutons, who produce eggs and an assortment of vegetable crops and who supplement their earnings every summer by renting out their guest house. This year the tenants are Sam and Annette Stein of Brooklyn, New York, and their daughter Barbara. The Steins have invited their close friends, Paul and Martha Selig, to spend a week on the farm with their son David and their daughter Judith. (Sam Stein and Paul Selig are hatching a scheme, destined ultimately to empty their bank accounts, to enter into a partnership and act as jobbers for replacement parts for television sets. Paul Selig is forever attempting unwise business ventures.) Today is the third day of the visit and this afternoon, mysteriously, David finds himself utterly alone. His father has gone on an all-day hike with Sam Stein. Their wives have driven off, taking five-year-old Judith with them, to explore the antique shops of Ellenville. No one remains on the premises except the tight-lipped Schieles, going somberly about their unending chores, and sixteen-year-old Barbara Stein, who has been David's classmate from the third grade on through high school. The Steins and the Seligs evidently have some unvoiced hope that romance will blossom between their offspring. This is naive of them. Barbara, a lush and reasonably beautiful dark-haired girl,

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sleek-skinned and long-legged, sophisticated and smooth of manner, is six months older than David chronologically and three or four years ahead of him in social development. She does not actually dislike him, but she regards him as strange, disturbing, alien and repellent. She has no knowledge of his special gift—no one does; he's seen to that—but she's had seven years to observe him at close range and she knows there's something fishy about him. She is a conventional girl, plainly destined to marry early (a doctor, a lawyer, an insurance broker) and have lots of babies, and the chances of romance flowering between her and anyone as dark-souled and odd as David Selig are slight. David knows this very well and he is not at all surprised, or even dismayed, when Barbara slips away in mid-morning. "If anyone asks," she says, "tell them I went for a stroll in the woods." David is not deceived. He knows she goes off to meet 19-year-old Hans Schiele at every chance she gets.

SO HE is left to his own resources. No matter. He has ways of entertaining himself. He settles down in a quiet corner of the fields. Time for mind-movies. Lazily he casts his net. The power rises and goes forth, looking for emanations. What shall I read, what shall I read? Ah. A sense of contact. His questing mind has snared another mind, a buzzing one, small, dim, intense. It is a bee's mind, in fact—David is not limited only to contact with humans. Of course there are no verbal outputs from the bee or any conceptual ones. If the bee thinks at all David is incapable of detecting those thoughts. But he does get into the bee's head. He experiences a strong sense of what it is like to be tiny and compact and winged and fuzzy. How dry the universe of a bee is: bloodless, desiccated, arid. He soars. He swoops. He evades a passing bird as monstrous as a winged elephant. He burrows deep into a steamy, pollen-laden blossom. He goes aloft again. He sees the world through the bee's faceted eyes. Everything breaks into a thousand fragments, as though seen through a cracked glass—the essential color of everything is gray, but odd hues lurk at the corners of things, peripheral blues and scarlets that do not correspond in any way to the colors he knows. But the mind of a bee is a limited one. David bores easily. He abandons the insect abruptly and, zooming his perceptions barnward, clicks into the soul of a hen. She is laying an egg! Rhythmic internal contractions, pleasurable and painful, like the voiding of a mighty turd. Frenzied squawks. The smarmy hencoop odor, sharp and biting. A sense of too much straw all

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about. The world looks dark and dull to this bird. *Heave. Heave.* Oooh! Orgasmic excitement! The egg slides through the hatch and lands safely. The hen subsides, fulfilled, exhausted. David departs from her in this moment of rapture. He plunges deep into the adjoining woods, finds a human mind, enters it. How much richer and more intense it is to make communion with his own species. His identity blurs into that of his communicant, who is Barbara Stein, who is naked and lying on a carpet of last year's fallen leaves. Her skin is damp with sweat. Hans' fingers dig into the soft flesh of her shoulders and his cheek, rough with blond stubble, abrades her cheek. His weight presses down on her and David picks up her clamorous heartbeat. He notices her hammering her heels against the calves of Hans' legs. And now he senses the first dizzying spasms of orgasm. David struggles to remain with her, but he knows he won't succeed—clinging to the consciousness of Barbara at a moment like this is like trying to ride a wild horse. She catapults David from her unsaddled mind. He travels only a short way—into the stolid soul of Hans Schiele. Hungry for information, David holds on with all his strength, hoping to keep contact, but no, he is flipped free. He tumbles uncontrollably, the world goes swinging past him in giddy streaks of color, until—*click!*—he finds a new sanctuary. All is calm here. He glides through a dark cold environment. He has no weight. His body is long and slender and agile—his mind is nearly a void, but through it run faint chilly flickering perceptions of a low order. He has entered the consciousness of a fish, perhaps a brook trout. Downstream he moves in the swiftly rushing creek, taking delight in the smoothness of his motions and the delicious texture of the pure icy water flowing past his fins. He can see very little and smell even less—information comes to him in the form of minute impacts on his scales, tiny deflections and interferences. Easily he responds to each incoming news item, now twisting to avoid a fang of rock, now fluttering his fins to seize some speedy subcurrent. The process is fascinating, but the trout itself is a dull companion and David, having extracted the troutness of the experience in two or three minutes, leaps gladly to a more complex mind the moment he approaches one. It is the mind of gnarled old Georg Schiele, Hans's father, who is at work in a remote corner of the cornfield. David has never entered the elder Schiele's mind before. The old man is a grim and forbidding character, well past sixty, who says little and stalks dourly through his day-long round of

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chores, his heavy-jowled face perpetually locked in a frosty scowl. The farmer gives off so unpleasant a psychic aura that David has steered clear of him, but so bored is he with the trout that he slips into Schiele now, slides down through dense layers of unintelligible Deutsch ruminations and strikes bottom in the basement of the farmer's soul, the place where his essence lives. Astonishment: old Schiele is a mystic, an ecstatic! No dourness here. No dark Lutheran vindictiveness. This is pure Buddhism: Schiele stands in the rich soil of his fields, leaning on his hoe, feet firmly planted, communing with the universe. God floods his soul. He touches the unity of all things. Sky, trees, earth, sun, plants, brook, insects, birds—everything is one, part of a seamless whole, and Schiele resonates in perfect harmony with it. How can this be? How can such a bleak, inaccessible man entertain such raptures in his depths? Feel his joy! Sensations drench him! Birdsong, sunlight, the scent of flowers and clods of upturned earth, the rustling of the sharp-bladed green cornstalks, the trickle of sweat down the reddened deep-channeled neck, the curve of the planet, the fleecy premature outline of the full moon, a thousand delights enfold this man. David shares his pleasure. He kneels in his mind, reverent, awed. The world is a mighty hymn. Schiele breaks from his stasis, raises his hoe, brings it down. Heavy muscles go taut and metal digs into earth and everything is as it should be, all conforms to the divine plan. Is this how Schiele goes through his days? Is such happiness possible? David is surprised to find tears bulging in his eyes. This simple man, this narrow man, lives in daily grace. Suddenly sullen, bitterly envious, David rips his mind free, whirls, projects it toward the woods, drops down into Barbara Stein again. She lies back, sweat-sticky, exhausted. She rubs her hands over her skin, plucking stray bits of leaf and grass from herself. Her mind is slow, dull, almost as empty as the trout's just now: sex seems to have drained her of personality. David shifts to Hans and finds him no better. Lying by Barbara's side, still breathing hard after his exertions, he is torpid and depressed. All desire is gone from him—peering sleepily at the girl he has just possessed, he is conscious mainly of body odors and the untidiness of her hair. Through the upper levels of his mind wanders a wistful thought, in English punctuated by clumsy German, of a girl from an adjoining farm who will do something to him that Barbara refuses to do. Hans will be seeing her on Saturday night. Poor Barbara, David thinks, and wonders what she would say if

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she knew what Hans is thinking. Idly he tries to bridge their two minds, entering both in the mischievous hope that thoughts may flow from one to the other, but he miscalculates his span and finds himself returning to old Schiele, deep in his ecstasy, while holding contact with Hans as well. Father and son, old and young, priest and profaner. David sustains the twin contact a moment. He shivers. He is filled with a thundering sense of the wholeness of life.

IT WAS like that all the time in those years—an endless trip, a gaudy voyage. But powers decay. Time leaches the colors from the best of visions. The world becomes grayer. Entropy beats us down. Everything fades. Everything goes. Everything dies.

XI

JUDITH'S dark, rambling apartment fills with pungent smells. I hear her in the kitchen, bustling, dumping spices into the pot: hot chili, oregano, tarragon, cloves, garlic, powdered mustard, sesame oil, curry powder, God knows what else. Fire burn and cauldron bubble. Her famous fiery spaghetti sauce is in the making.

I have arrived unexpectedly early, a half-hour before the appointed time, catching Judith unprepared, not even dressed, so I am on my own while she readies dinner. "Fix yourself a drink," she calls to me. I go to the sideboard and pour a shot of dark rum, then into the kitchen for ice cubes. Judith, flustered, wearing housecoat and headband, flies madly about, breathlessly selecting spices. She does everything at top speed. "Be with you in another ten minutes," she gasps, reaching for the pepper mill. "Is the kid making a lot of trouble for you?"

My nephew, she means. His name is Paul, in honor of our father which art in heaven, but she never calls him that, only "the baby," "the kid." Four years old. Child of divorce, destined to be as taut-strung as his mother. "He's not bothering me at all," I assure her and go back to the living room.

The apartment is one of those old, immense West Side jobs, roomy and high-ceilinged, which carries with it some sort of aura of intellectual distinction simply because so many critics, poets, playwrights, and choreographers have lived in similar apartments in this very neighborhood. Giant living room with many windows looking out over West End Avenue —formal dining room, big kitchen, master bedroom, child's room, maid's room, two bathrooms. All for Judith and her cub. The rent is cosmic, but Judith can manage it. She gets well over a thousand a month from her ex and

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earns a modest but decent living of her own as an editor and translator. Aside from that she has a small income from a portfolio of stocks, shrewdly chosen for her a few years ago by a lover from Wall Street, which she purchased with her inherited share of our parents' surprisingly robust savings. (My share went to clean up accumulated debts—the whole thing melted like June snow.) The place is furnished half in 1960 Greenwich Village and half in 1970 Urban Elegance—black pole lamps, gray string chairs, red brick bookcases, cheap prints and wax-encrusted Chianti bottles on the one hand; leather couches. Hopi pottery, psychedelic silk-screens, glass-topped coffee tables and giant potted cacti on the other. Bach harpsichord sonatas tinkle from the thousand-dollar speaker system. The floor, ebony-dark and mirror-bright, gleams between the lush, thick area rugs. A good life my sister leads here. Good and miserable.

The kid eyes me untrustingly. He sits twenty feet away by the window, fiddling with some intricate plastic toy but keeping close watch on me. A dark child, slender and tense like his mother, aloof, cool. No love is lost between us—I've been inside his head and I know what he thinks of me. To him I'm one of the many men in his mother's life, a real uncle being not very different from the innumerable uncle-surrogates forever sleeping over. I suppose he thinks I'm just one of her lovers who shows up more often than most. An understandable error. But while he resents the others merely because they compete with him for her affection, he looks coldly upon me because he thinks I've caused his mother pain—he dislikes me for her sake. How shrewdly he's discerned the decades-old network of hostilities and tensions that shapes and defines my relationship with Judith! So I'm an enemy. He'd gut me if he could.

I SIP my drink, listen to Bach, smile insincerely at the kid, and inhale the aroma of spaghetti sauce. My power is practically quiescent—I try not to use it much here and in any case its intake is feeble today. After some time Judith emerges from the kitchen and, flashing across the living room, says, "Come talk to me while I get dressed, Duv." I follow her to her bedroom and sit down on the bed. She takes her clothes into the adjoining bathroom, leaving the door open only an inch or two. The last time I saw her naked she was seven years old. She says, "I'm glad you decided to come."

"So am I."

"You look awfully peaked though."

"Just hungry, Jude."

"I'll fix that in five minutes." Sounds of water running. She says

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something else. The sink drowns her out. I look idly around the bedroom. A man's white shirt, much too big for Judith, hangs casually from the doorknob of the closet. On the night table sit two fat textbooky-looking books; *Analytical Neuroendocrinology* and *Studies in the Physiology of Thermoregulation.* Unlikely reading for Judith. Both by the same author: K.F. Silvestri, M.D., Ph.D.

"You going to medical school these days?" I ask.

"The books, you mean? They're Karl's."

Karl? A new name. Dr. Karl F. Silvestri. I touch her mind lightly and extract his image: a tall hefty sober-faced man, broad shoulders, strong dimpled chin, flowing mane of graying hair. About fifty, I'd guess. Judith digs older men. While I raid her consciousness she tells me about him. Her current "friend," the kid's latest "uncle." He's someone very big at Columbia Medical Center, a real authority on the human body. Newly divorced after a twenty-five-year marriage. Uh-huh, she likes getting them on the rebound. He met her three weeks ago through a mutual friend, a psychoanalyst. They've only seen each other four or five times—he's always busy, committee meetings at this hospital or that, seminars, consultations. It must be a serious affair if she's trying to read his books. They look absolutely opaque to me, all charts and statistical tables and heavy Latinate terminology.

She comes out of the bathroom wearing a sleek purple pants-suit and the crystal earrings I gave her for her twenty-ninth birthday. When I visit she always tries to register some little sentimental touch to tie us together—tonight it's the earrings. There is a convalescent quality to our friendship nowadays, as we tiptoe gently through the garden where our old hatred lies buried. We embrace, a brother-sister hug. A pleasant perfume. "Hello," she says. "I'm sorry I was such a mess when you walked in."

"It's my fault. I was too early. Anyway, you weren't a mess at all."

She leads me to the living room. She carries herself well. Judith is a handsome woman, tall and extremely slender, exotic-looking, with dark hair, dark complexion, sharp cheekbones. The slim sultry type. I suppose she'd be considered very sexy but that there is something cruel about her thin lips and her quick glistening brown eyes—and that cruelty, which grows more intense in these years of divorce and discontent, turns people off. She's had lovers by the dozen, by the gross, but not much love. You and me, sis, you and me. Chips off the old block.

She sets the table while I fix a

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drink for her. The kid, thank God, has already eaten—I hate having him at the table. He plays with his plastic thingy and favors me with occasional sour glares. Judith and I clink our cocktail glasses together, a stagy gesture. She produces a wintry smile. "Cheers," we say. Cheers.

"Why don't you move back downtown?" she asks. "We could see more of each other."

"It's cheap up there. Do we want to see more of each other?"

"Who else do we have?"

"You have Karl."

"I don't *have* him or anybody. Just my kid and my brother."

I think of the time when I tried to murder her in her bassinet. She doesn't know about that. "Are we really friends, Jude?"

"Now we are. At last."

"We haven't exactly been fond of each other all these years."

"People change, Duv. They grow up. I was dumb, so wrapped up in myself that I couldn't give anything but hate to anybody around me. That's over now. If you don't believe me, look into my head and see."

"You don't want me poking around in there."

"Go ahead," she says. "Take a good look and see if I haven't changed toward you."

"No. I'd rather not." I deal myself another two ounces of rum. The hand shakes a little. "Shouldn't you check the spaghetti sauce? Maybe it's boiling over."

"Let it boil. I haven't finished my drink. Duv, are you still having trouble? With your power, I mean."

"Yes. Still. Worse than ever."

"What do you think is happening?"

I shrug. Insouciant old me. "I'm losing it, that's all. It's like hair, I suppose. A lot of it when you're young, then less and less and finally none. Screw it. It never did me any good anyway."

"You don't mean that."

"Show me what it did for me."

"It made you someone special. It made you unique. When everything else went wrong for you, you could always fall back on that, the knowledge that you could go into minds, that you could see the unseeable, that you could get close to people's souls. A gift from God."

"A useless gift. Except if I'd gone into the sideshow business."

"It made you a richer person. More complex, more interesting. Without it you might have been someone quite ordinary."

"With it I turned out to be someone quite ordinary. A nobody, a zero. Without it I might have been a happy nobody instead of a dismal one."

"You pity yourself a lot, Duv."

"I've got a lot to pity myself for. Another drink, Jude?"

"Thanks, no. I ought to look after dinner."

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SHE goes into the kitchen. Behind me the kid begins to chant derisive nonsense syllables in his weirdly mature baritone. Even in my current state of dulled receptivity I feel the pressure of the kid's cold hatred against the back of my skull. Judith returns, toting a well-laden tray—spaghetti, garlic bread, cheese. We clink wine glasses. We eat in silence a few minutes. She says finally, "Can I do some mindreading on you, Duv?"

"Be my guest."

"You say you're glad the power's going. Is that snow job directed at me or at yourself? Because you're snowing somebody. You hate the idea of losing it, don't you?"

"A little."

"A lot, Duv."

"All right, a lot. I'm of two minds. I'd like it to vanish completely. Christ, I wish I'd never had it. But on the other hand—if I lose it who am I? Where's my identity? I'm Selig the Mindreader, right? The Amazing Mental Man. So if I stop being him—you see, Jude?"

"I see. The pain's all over your face. I'm so sorry, Duv."

"For what?"

"That you're losing it."

"You despised my guts for using it on you, didn't you?"

"That's different. That was a long time ago. I know what you must be going through now. Do you have any idea of why you're losing it?"

"No. A function of aging, I guess."

"Is there anything that might be done to stop it from going?"

"I doubt it, Jude. I don't even know why I have the gift in the first place, let alone how to nurture it now. I don't know how it works. It's just something in my head, a genetic fluke, a thing I was born with, like freckles. If your freckles start to fade can you figure out a way of making them stay—if you want them to stay?"

"You've never let yourself be studied, have you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't like people poking in my head any more than you do," I say softly. "I don't want to be a case history. I've always kept a low profile. If the world ever found out about me I'd become a pariah. I'd probably be lynched. Do you know how many people there are to whom I've openly admitted the truth about myself? In my whole life, how many?"

"A dozen?"

"Three," I say. "And I wouldn't willingly have told any of them."

"Three?"

"You. I suppose you suspected it all along, but you didn't find out for sure till you were sixteen, remember? Then there's Tom Nyquist, whom I don't see any more. And a girl named

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Kitty, whom I don't see any more either."

"What about the tall brunette?"

"Toni? I never explicitly told her. I tried to hide it from her. She found out indirectly. A lot of people may have found out indirectly. But I've only told three. I don't want to be known as a freak. So let it fade. Let it die. Good riddance."

"You want to keep it, though."

"To keep it and lose it, both."

"That's a contradiction."

"Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes. What can I say, Jude? What can I tell you that's true?"

"Are you in pain?"

"Who isn't in pain?"

She says, "Losing it is almost like becoming impotent, isn't it, Duv? To reach into a mind and find out that you can't connect? You said there was ecstasy in it for you, once. That flood of information, that vicarious experience. And now you can't get it as much—or at all. You mind can't get it up. Do you see it that way, as a sexual metaphor?"

"Sometimes." I give her more wine. For a few minutes we sit silently, shoveling down the spaghetti, exchanging tentative grins. I almost feel warmth toward her. Forgiveness for all the years when she treated me like a circus attraction. *You sneaky bastard, Duv, stay out of my head or I'll kill you! You voyeur. You peeper. Keep away, man, keep away.* She didn't want me to meet her fiance. Afraid I'd tell him about her other men, I guess. *I'd like to find you dead in the gutter some day, Duv, with all my secrets rotting inside you.* So long ago. Maybe we love each other a little now, Jude. Just a little, but you love me more than I love you.

"I don't come any more," she says abruptly. "You know, I used to—practically every time. The original Hot Pants Kid, me. But around five years ago something happened, around the time my marriage was first breaking up. I started feeling the ability to respond slip away from me. Finally I couldn't make it at all. I still can't. It's one of the things Karl's going to work on with me. So I know what it's like, Duv. What you must be going through. To lose your best way of making contact with others. To lose contact gradually with yourself. To become a stranger in your own head." She smiles. "Did you know that about me? About the troubles I've been having?"

I hesitate briefly. The icy glare in her eyes gives her away. The aggressiveness. The resentment she feels. Even when she tries to be loving she can't help hating. How fragile our relationship is! We're locked in a kind of marriage, Judith and I, an old burned-out marriage

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held together with skewers. What the hell, though. "Yes," I tell her. "I knew about it."

"I thought so. You've never stopped probing me." Her smile is all hateful glee now. She's glad I'm losing it. She's relieved. "I'm always wide open to you, Duv."

"Don't worry, you won't be much longer." Oh, you sadistic bitch! And you're all I've got. "How about some more spaghetti, Jude?" Sister. Sister. Sister.

XII

Yahya Lumumba
Humanities 2A, Dr. Katz
November 10, 1976

THE "ELECTRA" THEME IN AESCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES AND EURIPIDES

The use of the "Electra" motif by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides is a study in varying dramatic methods and modes of attack. The plot is basically the same in Aeschylus' *Choephori* and the *Electras* of Sophocles and Euripides: Orestes, exiled son of murdered Agamemnon, returns to his native Mycenae, where he discovers his sister Electra. She persuades him to avenge Agamenmon's murder by killing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, who had slain Agamemnon on his return from Troy.

Aeschylus, unlike his later rivals, held as prime consideration the ethical and religious aspects of Orestes' crime. Characterization and motivation in *The Choephori* are simple to the point of inviting ridicule—as, indeed, we can see when the more worldly-minded Euripides ridicules Aeschylus in the recognition scene of his *Electra.* In Aeschylus' play Orestes appears accompanied by his friend Pylades and places an offering on Agamemnon's tomb—a lock of his hair. They withdraw and lamenting Electra comes to the tomb. Noticing the lock of hair, she recognizes it as being "like unto those my father's children wear," and decides Orestes has sent it to the tomb as a token of mourning. Orestes then reappears and identifies himself to Electra. It is this implausible means of identification which was parodied by Euripides. . .

OH, GOD. This is deadly. This is no damned good at all. Could Yahya Lumumba have written any of this crap? Phony from Word One. Why should Yahya Lumumba give a damn about Greek tragedy? Why should I? What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba that he should weep for her? I'll tear this up and start again. I'll write it jivey, man.

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I'll give it that rhythm. God help me to think black. But I can't. But I can't. Christ, I'd like to throw up. I think I'm getting a fever. Wait. Maybe a joint would help some. Yeah. Let's get high and try again. A lil ole stick of mootah. Get some soul into it, man. Smartass white Jew-bastard, get some soul into it, you hear? Okay, now. There was this cat Agamemnon, he was one big important mother, you hear, he was The Man, but he got screwed all the same. His old lady Clytemnestra, she was makin' it with this Aegisthus and one day she say, Baby, let's waste old Aggie, you and me, and then you gonna be king—gwine be king?—gonna—and we have a high ole time. Aggie, he off in the Nam runnin' the show, but he come home for some R & R and before he know what happenin' they stick him good, right, they really cut him and that all for *him*. Now there this crazy broad Electra, dig, she the daughter of ole Aggie and she get real uptight when they use him up, so she say to her brother, his name Orestes, she say, listen, Orestes, I want you to *get* them two—I want you to get them real good. Now, this cat Orestes he been out of town for a while, he don't know the score, but. . .

Yeah, that's it, man! You're digging it! Now go on to explain about Euripides' use of the *deus ex machina* and the cathartic virtues of Sophocles' dramatic technique. Sure. What a dumb shmuck you are, Selig. What a dumb shmuck.

XIII

NYQUIST said, "The real trouble with you, Selig, is that you're a deeply religious man who doesn't happen to believe in God." Nyquist was always saying things like that and Selig never could be sure whether he meant them or was just playing verbal games. No matter how deeply Selig penetrated the other man's soul he never could be sure of anything. Nyquist was too wily, too elusive.

Playing it safe, Selig said nothing. He stood with his back to Nyquist, looking through the window. Snow was falling. The narrow streets below were choked with it—not even the municipal snowplows could get through and a strange serenity prevailed. High winds whipped the drifts about. Parked cars were disappearing under the white blanket. It had been snowing on and off for three days. Snow was general all over the Northeast. It was falling on every filthy city, on the arid suburbs, falling softly upon the Appalachians and, farther eastward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Atlantic waves. Nothing was moving in New York City. Everything was shut down—office buildings, schools, the

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concert halls, the theaters. The railroads were out of commission and the highways were blocked. There was no action at the airports. Unable to get to work, Selig had waited out most of the blizzard in Nyquist's apartment, spending so much time with him that by now he had come to find his friend's company stifling and oppressive. What earlier had seemed amusing and charming in Nyquist had become abrasive and tricksy. Nyquist's bland self-assurance conveyed itself now as smugness—his casual forays into Selig's mind were no longer affectionate gestures of intimacy, but, rather, conscious acts of aggression. His habit of repeating aloud what Selig was thinking was increasingly irritating and there seemed to be no deterring him from that. Here he was doing it again, plucking a quotation from Selig's head and declaiming it in half-mocking tones: "Ah. How pretty. 'His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.' I like that. What is it, David?"

"James Joyce," said Selig sourly. " 'The Dead,' from *Dubliners*. I asked you not to do that."

Nyquist, gesturing broadly as Selig stepped away from the window, turned his palms outward. "I'm sorry. I forgot you didn't like it."

"You never forget a thing, Tom. You never do anything accidentally." Then, guilty over his peevishness: "Christ, I've had about enough snow!"

"Snow is general," said Nyquist. "It isn't ever going to stop. What are we going to do today?"

"The same as yesterday and the day before, I imagine. Sit around watching the snowflakes fall and listen to records and get sloshed."

"How about getting laid?"

"I don't think you're my type."

Nyquist flashed an empty smile. "Funny man. I mean finding a couple of ladies marooned somewhere in this building and inviting them to a little party."

"We could try, I suppose," Selig said, shrugging. "Is there any more bourbon?"

"I'll get it," Nyquist said.

He brought over the bottle. Nyquist moved with a strange slowness, like a man moving through a dense reluctant atmosphere of mercury or some other viscious fluid. Selig had never seen him hurry. He was heavy without being fat, a thick-shouldered, thick-necked man with a square head, close-cropped yellow hair, a flat wide-flanged nose and an easy, innocent grin. Very, very Aryan—he was Scandinavian, a Swede perhaps, raised in Finland and transplanted to the United States at the age of ten. He still had the elusive traces of an accent. He said he was twenty-eight and looked a

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few years older than that to Selig, who had just turned twenty-three. This was February, 1958. Eisenhower was President, the stock market had gone to hell, the post-Sputnik emotional slump was troubling everybody even though the first American space satellite had just been orbited and the latest feminine fashion was the gunny-sack chemise. Selig was living in Brooklyn Heights, commuting several days a week to the office of a publishing company for which he was doing freelance copy-editing at three dollars an hour. Nyquist lived in the same building, four floors higher.

He was the only other person Selig knew who had the power. Not only that, having it hadn't crippled him at all. Nyquist used his gift as simply and as naturally as he did his eyes or his legs, for his own advantage, without apologies and without guilt. Perhaps he was the least neurotic person Selig had ever met. By occupation he was a predator, skimming an income by raiding the minds of others, but like any jungle cat he pounced only when hungry, never for sheer love of pouncing. He took what he needed, never questioning the providence that had made him so superbly fitted for taking, yet he did not take more than he needed and his needs were moderate. He held no job and apparently never had held one. Whenever he wanted money he made the ten-minute subway ride to Wall Street and rummaged about freely in the minds of the moneymen cloistered in the lofty boardrooms. On any given day there was always some major development hatching that would have an impact on the market—a merger, a stock split, an ore discovery, a favorable earnings report—and Nyquist had no difficulty learning the essential details. This information he swiftly sold at handsome but reasonable fees to some twelve or fifteen private investors who had learned in the happiest possible way that Nyquist was a reliable tout. Many of the unaccountable leaks on which quick fortunes had been made in the bull market of the '50's were his doing. He earned a comfortable living this way, enough to support himself in a congenial style. His apartment was small and agreeable—black naugahyde upholstery, Tiffany lamps, Picasso wallpaper, a well-stocked liquor closet, a superb music system that emitted a seamless flow of Monteverdi and Palestrina, Bartok and Stravinsky. He lived a gracious bachelor life, going out often, making the rounds of his favorite restaurants, all of them obscure and ethnic—Japanese, Pakistani, Syrian, Greek. His circle of friends was limited but distinguished—painters, writers, musicians, poets, mainly. He slept with many women but Selig rarely saw him with the same one twice.

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LIKE Selig, Nyquist could receive but was unable to send—he was, however, able to tell when his own mind was being probed. That was how they had happened to meet. Selig, newly arrived in the building, had indulged himself in his hobby, letting his consciousness rove freely from floor to floor by way of getting acquainted with his neighbors. Bouncing about, surveying this head and that, finding nothing of any special interest—and then suddenly:

—Tell me where you are.

A crystalline string of words glimmering at the periphery of a sturdy, complacent mind. The statement came through with the immediacy of an explicit message. Yet Selig realized that no act of active transmission had taken place—he had simply found the words lying passively in wait. He made quick reply:

—Thirty-five Pierrepont Street.

—No, I know that. I mean, where are you in the building?

—Fourth floor.

—I'm on the eighth. What's your name?

—Selig.

—Nyquist.

The mental contact was stunningly intimate. It was almost a sexual thing, as though he were slicing into a body, not a mind, and he was abashed by the resonant masculinity of the soul he had entered—he felt that there was something not quite permissible about such closeness with another man. But he did not draw back. That rapid interplay of verbal communication across the gap of darkness was a delicious experience, too rewarding to reject. Selig had the momentary illusion of having expanded his powers, of having learned how to send as well as to draw forth the contents of other minds. It was, he knew, only an illusion. He was sending nothing, nor was Nyquist. He and Nyquist were merely picking information out of each other's minds. Each planted phrases for the other to find, which was not quite the same thing, in terms of the situational dynamics, as sending messages to one another. It was a fine and possibly pointless distinction, though—the net effect of the juxtaposition of two wide-open receivers was an efficient send/receive circuit as reliable as a telephone. Tentatively, self-consciously, Selig reached into the lower levels of Nyquist's consciousness, seeking the man as well as the messages, and as he did so he was vaguely aware of disquiet in the depths of his own mind, probably indicating that Nyquist was doing the same to him. For long minutes they explored each other like lovers entwined in the first discovering caresses, although there was nothing loving about Nyquist's touch, which was cool and impersonal. Nevertheless Selig quivered—he felt as if he

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stood at the edge of an abyss. At last he gently withdrew, as did Nyquist. Then, from the other:

—Come upstairs. I'll meet you by the elevator.

He was bigger than Selig expected, a fullback of a man, his blue eyes uninviting, his smile a purely formal one. He was remote without actually being cold. Nyquist offered him a drink and they talked, keeping out of one another's minds as much as possible. It was a subdued visit, unsentimental, no tears of joy at having come together at last. Nyquist was affable, accessible, pleased that Selig had appeared, but not at all delirious with excitement at the discovery of a fellow freak. Possibly it was because he had discovered fellow freaks before. "There are others," he said. "You're the third, fourth, fifth I've met since I came to the States. Let's see—one in Chicago, one in San Francisco, one in Miami, one in Minneapolis. You're the fifth. Two women, three men in all."

"Are you still in touch with the others?"

"No."

"What happened?"

"We drifted apart," Nyquist said. "What did you expect? That we'd be clannish? Look, we talked, we played games with our minds, we got to know each other and after a while we got bored. I think two of them are dead now. I don't mind being isolated from the rest of my kind. I don't think of myself as one of a tribe."

"I never met another one," said Selig. "Until today."

"It isn't important. What's important is living your own life. How old were you when you found out you could do it?"

"I don't know. Five, six years old, maybe. And you?"

"I didn't realize I had anything special until I was eleven. I thought everybody could do it. It was only after I came to the States and heard people thinking in a different language that I knew there was something out of the ordinary about my mind."

"What kind of work do you do?" Selig asked.

"As little as I can," said Nyquist. He grinned and thrust his perceptors brusquely into Selig's mind. It seemed like an invitation of sorts—Selig accepted it and pushed forth his own antennae. Roaming the other man's consciousness, he quickly grasped the picture of Nyquist's Wall Street sorties. He saw the entire balanced, rhythmic, unobsessive life of the man. He was amazed by Nyquist's coolness, his wholeness, his clarity of spirit. How limpid Nyquist's soul was! How unmarred by life! Where did he keep his anguish? Where did he hide his loneliness, his fear, his insecurity? Nyquist, withdrawing, said, "Why do you feel so sorry for yourself?"

"Do I?"

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"It's all over your head. What's the problem, Selig? I've looked into you and I don't see the problem, only the pain."

"The problem is that I feel isolated somewhat from other human beings."

"Isolated? You? You can get right inside people's heads. You can do something that ninety-nine point nine hundred and ninety-nine percent of the human race can't do. They've got to struggle along using words, approximations, semaphore signals, and you go straight to the core of meaning. How can you pretend you're isolated?"

"The information I get is useless," Selig said. "I can't act on it. I might just as well not be reading it in."

"Why?"

"Because it's just voyeurism. I'm spying on them. Sometimes I see myself as a kind of leech. A parasite. A vampire."

"You feel guilty about that?"

"Don't you?"

"I didn't ask for my gift," Nyquist said. "I just happen to have it. Since I have it, I use it. I like it. I like the life I lead. I like myself. Why don't you like yourself, Selig?"

"You tell me."

But Nyquist had nothing to tell him and when Selig had finished his drink he went back downstairs. His own apartment seemed so strange to him as he reentered it that he spent a few minutes handling familiar artifacts, his parents' photograph, his little collection of adolescent love-letters, the plastic toy that the psychiatrist had given him years ago. He felt so jarred by the meeting, so intruded upon, that he resolved never to see Nyquist again, in fact to move somewhere else as soon as possible, to Manhattan, to Philadelphia, to Los Angeles, any place that might be beyond Nyquist's reach. All his life he had yearned to meet someone who shared his gift and now that he had he felt threatened. Nyquist was so much in control of his life that it was terrifying. He'll humiliate me, Selig thought. He'll devour me. But that panic faded. Two days later Nyquist came around to ask him out to dinner. They ate in a nearby Mexican restaurant and got smashed on Carta Blanca. It still appeared to Selig that Nyquist was toying with him, teasing him, holding him at arm's length and tickling him—but it was all done so amiably that Selig felt no resentment. Nyquist's charm was irresistible and his strength was worth taking as a model of behavior. Nyquist was like an older brother who had preceded him through this same vale of traumas and had emerged unscathed long ago—now he was jollying Selig into an acceptance of the terms of his existence. The superhuman condition, Nyquist called it.

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THEY became close friends. Two or three times a week they went out together, ate together, drank together. Selig had always imagined that a friendship with someone else of his kind would be uniquely intense, but this was not—after the first week they took their specialness for granted and rarely discussed the gift they shared, nor did they ever congratulate each other on having formed an alliance against the ungifted world around them. They communicated sometimes by words, sometimes by the direct contact of minds. It became an easy, cheerful relationship, strained only when Selig slipped into his habitual brooding mood and Nyquist mocked him for such self-indulgence. Even that was no difficulty between them until the blizzard—then all their tensions became exaggerated because they were spending so much time together.

"Hold out your glass," Nyquist said.

He poured an amber splash of bourbon. Selig settled back to drink while Nyquist set about finding girls for them. The project took him five minutes. He scanned the building and turned up a pair of roommates on the fifth floor. "Take a look," he said to Selig. Selig entered Nyquist's mind. Nyquist had attuned himself to the consciousness of one of the girls—sensual, sleepy, kittenish—and was looking through her eyes at the other, a tall gaunt blonde. The doubly refracted mental image nevertheless was quite clear—the blonde had a leggy voluptuousness and fashion-model poise. "That one's mine," Nyquist said. "Now tell me if you like yours." He jumped, Selig following along, to the mind of the blonde. Yes, a fashion model, more intelligent than the other girl, cold, selfish, passionate. From her mind, via Nyquist, came the image of her roommate, sprawled out on a sofa in a pink housecoat—a short plump redhead, breasty, full-faced. "Sure," Selig said. "Why not?" Nyquist, rummaging through minds, found the girls' phone number, called, worked his charm. They came up for drinks. "This awful snowstorm," the blonde said, shuddering. "It can drive you crazy!" The four of them went through a lot of liquor to a tinkling jazz accompaniment: Mingus, MJQ, Chico Hamilton. The redhead was better-looking than Selig had expected, not quite so plump or coarse—the double refraction must have introduced some distortions—but she giggled too much and he found himself disliking her to some degree. Still, there was no backing out now. Eventually, very late in the evening, they coupled off, Nyquist and the blonde in the bedroom, Selig and the redhead in the living room.

About the time he realized the redhead was too drunk to perform,

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Selig felt a tickle in his skull—Nyquist was probing him. This show of curiosity, this voyeurism, seemed an odd diversion for the usually self-contained Nyquist. Spying's *my* trick, Selig thought, and for a moment he was disturbed. Then: This has no deep significance, he told himself. Nyquist is wholly amoral and does what he pleases, peeks here and peeks there without regard for propriety—why should I let his scanning bother me? Recovering, he reciprocated the probe. Nyquist welcomed him:

—How you doing, Davey?

—Fine. Just fine.

—I got me a hot one here. Take a look.

Selig envied Nyquist's cool detachment. Nyquist, pausing a moment to detect and isolate Selig's sense of uneasiness, mocked it gently. You're worried that there's some kind of latent gayness in this thing, Nyquist told him. But I think what really scares you is contact, any sort of contact. Right? Wrong, Selig said, but he had felt the point hit home. Soon afterward their contact ceased.

Nyquist came into the living room half an hour later, the blonde with him. He didn't bother to knock, which surprised the redhead a little. Nyquist put on some music and they all sat quietly, Selig and the redhead working on the bourbon, Nyquist and the blonde nipping into the Scotch. Toward dawn, as the snow began to slacken, the redhead fumbled for her clothes. At the door, wobbling and staggering, making a boozy farewell, she let something slip. *In vino veritas.* "I can't help thinking there's something peculiar about you two guys. You aren't a couple of queers, by any chance?"

XIV

I TRIED to be good to Judith, I tried to be kind and loving, but our hatred kept coming between us. I said to myself, She's my kid sister, my only sibling, I must love her more. But you can't will love. You can't conjure it into existence on nothing more than good intentions. Besides, my intentions had never been that good. I saw her as a rival from the word go. I was the firstborn, I was the difficult one, the maladjusted one. I was supposed to be the center of everything. Those were the terms of my contract with God—I must suffer because I am different, but by way of compensation the entire universe will revolve about me. The girl baby who was brought into the household was intended to be nothing more than a therapeutic aid designed to help me relate better to the human race. That was the deal. She wasn't supposed to have independent reality as a person, she wasn't supposed to have her own needs or make demands or drain away parental love. Just a thing, an item of furniture. But I knew

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better than to believe that. I was ten years old, remember, when they adopted her. Your ten-year-old, he's no fool. I knew my parents, no longer feeling obliged now to direct all their concern exclusively toward their mysteriously intense and troubled son, would rapidly and with great relief transfer their attention and their love—yes, particularly their love—to the cuddly, uncomplicated infant. She would take my place at the center—I would become a quirky obsolescent artifact. Do you blame me for trying to kill her in her bassinet? On the other hand you can understand the origin of her lifelong coldness toward me. I offer no defense at this late date. The cycle of hatred began with me. With me, Jude, with me, with me, with me. You could have broken it with love, though, if you had wanted to. You didn't want to.

On a Saturday afternoon in May, 1961, I went out to my parents' house. In those years I didn't go there often, though I lived twenty minutes away by subway. I was outside the family circle, autonomous and remote, and I felt a powerful resistance to any kind of reattachment. For one thing I had free-floating hostilities toward my parents—their fluky genes, after all, had sent me into the world this way. And then, too, there was Judith, shriveling me with her disdain—did I need more of that? So I stayed away from the three of them for weeks, months at a time, until the melancholy maternal phone calls became too much for me, until the weight of my guilt overcame my resistance.

I was happy to discover, when I got there, that Judith was still in her bedroom, asleep. At three in the afternoon? Well, my mother said, she had been out late last night on a date. Judith was sixteen. I imagined her going to a high school basketball game with some skinny pimply kid and sipping milkshakes afterwards. Sleep well, sister, sleep on and on. But of course her absence put me into direct and unshielded confrontation with my sad and depleted parents. My mother, mild and dim, my father, weary and bitter. All my life they had steadily grown smaller. They seemed very small now. The seemed close to the vanishing point.

I had never lived in this apartment. For years Paul and Martha had struggled with the upkeep of a three-bedroom place they couldn't afford, simply because it had become impossible for Judith and me to share the same bedroom once she was past her infancy. The moment I left for college, taking a room near campus, they found a smaller and far less expensive one. Their bedroom was to the right of the entry foyer and Judith's, down a long hall and past the kitchen, was to the left. Straight ahead was the living room, in which my father sat dreamily leafing through the

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Times. He read nothing but the newspaper these days, though once his mind had been more active. From him came a dull sludgy emanation of fatigue. He was making some decent money for the first time in his life, actually would end up quite prosperous, yet he had conditioned himself to the poor-man psychology: poor Paul, you're a pitiful failure—you deserved so much better from life. I looked at the newspaper through his mind as he turned the pages. Yesterday Alan Shepard had made his epochal sub-orbital flight, the first manned venture into space by the United States. U.S. HURLS MAN 115 MILES INTO SPACE, cried the banner headline. SHEPARD WORKS CONTROLS IN CAPSULE, REPORTS BY RADIO IN 15-MINUTE FLIGHT. I groped for some way to connect with my father. "What did you think of the space voyage?" I asked. "Did you listen to the broadcast?" He shrugged. "Who gives a damn? It's all crazy. A waste of everybody's time and money." ELIZABETH VISITS POPE IN VATICAN. Fat Pope John, looking like a well-fed rabbi. JOHNSON TO MEET LEADERS IN ASIA ON U.S. TROOP USE. He skimmed onward, skipping pages. KENNEDY SIGNS WAGE-FLOOR BILL. Nothing registered on him, not even KENNEDY TO SEEK INCOME TAX CUTS. He lingered at the sports pages. A faint flicker of interest. MUD MAKES CARRY BACK STRONGER FAVORITE FOR 87th KENTUCKY DERBY TODAY. YANKS OPPOSE ANGELS IN OPENER OF 3-GAME SERIES BEFORE 21,000 ON COAST. "What do you like in the Derby?" I asked. He shook his head. "What do I know about horses?" he said. He was, I realized, already dead, although in fact his heart would beat for another decade. He had stopped responding. The world had defeated him.

I left him to his brooding and made polite talk with my mother: her Hadassah reading group was discussing *To Kill a Mockingbird* next Thursday and she wanted to know if I had read it. I hadn't. What was I doing with myself? Had I seen any good movies? *L'Avventura,* I said. Is that a French film, she asked? Italian, I said. She wanted me to describe the plot. She listened patiently, looking troubled, not following anything. "Who did you go with?" she asked. "Are you seeing any nice girls?" My son the bachelor. Already twenty-six and not even engaged. I deflected the tiresome question with patient skill born of long experience. Sorry, Martha. I won't give you the grandchildren you're waiting for.

"I have to baste the chicken now," she said and disappeared. I sat with my father for a while, until I couldn't stand that, and went down the hall to the john, next to Judith's room. Her door was ajar. I glanced in. Lights off, blinds drawn, but I touched her mind and

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found that she was awake and thinking of getting up. All right, make a gesture, be friendly, Duvid. It won't cost you anything. I knocked lightly. "Hi, it's me," I said. "Okay if I come in?"

SHE was sitting up, yawning, stretching. Her face, usually so taut, was puffy from too much sleep. From force of habit I went into her mind, and saw something new and surprising there. My sister's erotic inauguration. The night before. The whole thing: the scurry in the parked car, the rise of excitement, the sudden realization that this was going to be more than an interlude of petting, the panties coming down, the awkward shiftings of position, the moment of ultimate hesitation giving way to total willingness, the body against body, the quick explosion, the messy aftermath, the guilt and confusion and disappointment as it ended with Judith still unsatisfied. The drive home, silent, shamefaced. Into the house, tiptoe, hoarsely greeting the vigilant, unsleeping parents. The late night shower. Uneasy sleep, frequently punctured. A long stretch of wakefulness, in which the night's event is considered: she is pleased and relieved to have entered womanhood, but also frightened. Unwillingness to rise and face the world the next day, especially to face Paul and Martha. Judith, your secret is no secret to me.

"How are you?" I asked.

Stagily casual, she drawled, "Sleepy. I was out very late. How come you're here?"

"I drop in to see the family now and then."

"Nice to have seen you."

"That isn't friendly, Jude. Am I that loathsome to you?"

"Why are you bothering me, Duv?"

"I told you, I'm trying to be sociable. You're my only sister, the only one I'll ever have. I thought I'd stick my head in the door and say hello."

"You've done that. So?"

"You might tell me what you've been doing with yourself since the last time I saw you."

"Do you care?"

"If I didn't care, would I ask?"

"Sure," she said. "You don't give a crap about what I've been doing. You don't give a crap about anybody but David Selig and why pretend otherwise? You don't need to ask me polite questions. They aren't natural coming from you."

"Hey, hold on!" Let's not be duelling so fast, sister. "What gives you the idea that—"

"Do you think of me from one week to the next? I'm just furniture to you. The drippy little sister. The brat. The inconvenience. Have you ever talked to me? About anything? Do you even know the name of the school I go to? I'm a total stranger to you."

"No, you're not."

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"What the hell *do* you know about me?"

"Plenty."

"For example."

"Quit it, Jude."

"One example. Just one. One thing about me. For example—"

"For example. All right. For example, I know that you got laid last night."

We were both amazed by that. I stood in shocked silence, not believing that I had allowed those words to pass my lips—and Judith jerked as though electrified, her body stiffening and rearing, her eyes blazing with astonishment. I don't know how long we remained frozen, unable to speak.

"What?" she said finally. "What did you say, Duv?"

"You heard it."

"I heard it but I think I must have dreamed it. Say it again."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Leave me alone, Jude."

"Who told you?"

"Please, Jude—"

"*Who told you*?"

"Nobody," I muttered.

Her smile was terrifyingly triumphant. "You know something? I believe you. I honestly believe you. Nobody told you. You pulled it right out of my mind, didn't you, Duv?"

"I wish I had never come in here."

"Admit it. Why won't you admit it? You see into people's minds, don't you, Duvid? You're some kind of circus freak. I've suspected that a long time. All those little hunches you have—and they always turn out to be right—and the embarrassed phony way you cover up for yourself when you're right. Talking about your 'luck' at guessing things. Sure! Sure, luck! I knew the real scoop. I said to myself, This bastard is reading my mind. But I told myself it was crazy, there aren't any such people—it has to be impossible. Only it's true, isn't it? You don't guess. You look. We're wide open to you and you read us like books. Spying on us. Isn't that so?"

"Stop it, Jude."

"You didn't answer my other question. You've got this weird power, don't you? *Don't you*?"

"Yes."

"And you've been secretly spying on people all your life."

"Yes. Yes."

"I knew it. I didn't know—but I really did, all along. And it explains so much. Why I always felt dirty when I was a kid and you were around. Why I felt as if anything I did was likely to show up in tomorrow's newspapers. I never had any privacy, even when I was locked in the bathroom. I didn't *feel* private." She shuddered. "I hope I never see you again, Duv. Now that I know what you are. I wish I never *had* seen you. If I ever catch you poking around in my head after this, I'll—"

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I stumbled away. In the bathroom I gripped the cold edge of the sink and leaned close to the mirror to study my flushed, flustered face. I looked stunned and dazed, my features as rigid as though I had had a stroke. *I know that you got laid last night.* Why had I told her that? An accident? The words spilling out of me because she had goaded me past the point of prudence? But I had never let anyone push me into a revelation like that before. There are no accidents, Freud said. There are never any slips of the tongue. Everything's deliberate on one level or another. I must have said what I did to Judith because I wanted her at last to know the truth about me. But why? Why her? I had told Nyquist, yes—there could be no risk in that—but I had never admitted it to anyone else. And now Judith knew. I had given her a weapon with which she could destroy me.

I had given her a weapon. How strange that she never chose to use it.

XV

I REMAIN on dead center. Becalmed, static, anchored. No, that's a lie, or if not a lie then at the very least a benign misstatement, a faulty cluster of metaphors. I am ebbing. My tide is going out. I am revealed as a bare rocky shore, iron-hard, with trailing streamers of dirty brown seaweed dangling toward the absenting surf. Green crabs scuttling about. Yes, I ebb, which is to say I diminish, I attenuate. Do you know, I feel quite calm about it now? Of course my moods fluctuate but

I feel
Quite calm
About it now.

This is the third year since first I began to recede from myself. I think it started in the spring of 1974. Until then it worked faultlessly, I mean the power, always there when I had occasion to call upon it, always dependable, doing all its customary tricks, serving me in all my dirty needs—and then without warning, without reason, it began dying. Little failures of input. Tiny episodes of psychic impotence. I would be snug and smug inside someone's head, scanning scandals thought to be safely hidden, and suddenly everything would blur and become uncertain. Rather like reading the *Times* and having the text abruptly turn to Joycean dream-gabble between one line and the next, so that a straightforward dreary account of the latest Presidential fact-finding commission's finding of futile facts metamorphosed into a foggy impenetrable report on old Earwicker's borborygmi. At such times I would falter and pull out in fear. What would you do if you believed you were in bed with your heart's desire and

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awakened to find yourself screwing a starfish? But these unclarities and distortions were not the worst part—I think the inversions were, the total reversal of signal. Such as picking up a flash of love when what was really being radiated was frosty hatred. Or vice versa. When that happens—and it had—I want to pound on walls to test reality. From Judith one day I got strong waves of sexual desire, an overpowering incestuous yearning that cost me a fine dinner as I ran nauseated and retching to the bowl. All an error, all a deception—she was aiming spears at me and I took them for Cupid's arrows, more fool I. Well, after that I got blank spaces, tiny deaths of perception in mid-contact. And after those came mingled imputs, crossed wires, two minds coming in at once and me unable to tell the which from the which. For a time the color appercept dropped out, though that has come back, one of the many false returns. And there were other losses, barely discernible ones but cumulative in their effect. I make lists now of the things I once could do that I can do no longer. Inventories of the shrinkage. Like a dying man confined to his bed, paralyzed but observant, watching his relatives pilfer his goods. This day the television set has gone, this day the Thackeray first editions, this day the spoons—and now they have made off with my Piranesis and tomorrow it will be the pots and pans, the Venetian blinds, my neckties and my trousers and by next week they will be taking toes, intestines, corneas, testicles, lungs and nostrils. What will they use my nostrils for? I used to fight back with long walks, cold showers, tennis, massive doses of Vitamin A, and other hopeful, implausible remedies—and more recently I experimented with fasting and pure thoughts, but such struggling now seems to me inappropriate and even blasphemous. These days I strive toward cheerful acceptance of loss—with such success as you may have already perceived. I accept, I accept. Do you see that quality of acceptance growing in me? Make no mistake—I am sincere. This morning, at least, I am well on my way to acceptance, as golden autumn sunlight floods my room and expands my tattered soul. I lie here practicing the techniques that will make me invulnerable to the knowledge that it's all fleeing from me. I search for the joy that I know lies buried in the awareness of decline. *Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, The last of life, for which the first was made.* Do you believe that? I believe that. I'm getting better at believing all sorts of things. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast. Good old Browning!

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Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand, but go!
Be our joys three parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain.

Yes. Of course. And be our pains three parts joy, he might have added. Such joy this morning. And it's all fleeing from me, all ebbing. Going out of me from every pore.

Silence is coming over me. I will speak to no one after it's gone. And no one will speak to me.

NATURALLY I feel some sorrow over what's happening—I feel regret, anger and frustration and despair, but also, strangely, I feel shame. My cheeks burn, my eyes will not meet other eyes, I can hardly face my fellow mortals for the shame of it, as if something precious had been entrusted to me and I had failed in my trusteeship. I must say to the world, I've wasted my assets, I've squandered my patrimony, I've let it slip away, going, going, I'm a bankrupt now, a bankrupt. Perhaps this is a family trait, this embarrassment when disaster comes. We Seligs like to tell the world we are orderly people, captains of our souls, and when something external downs us we are abashed. I remember when my parents briefly owned a car, a dark green 1948 Chevrolet purchased at some absurdly low price in 1950, and we were driving somewhere deep in Queens, perhaps on our way to my grandmother's grave, the annual pilgrimage, and a car emerged from a blind alley and hit us. A drunk at the wheel. Nobody hurt, but our fender badly crumpled and our grille broken. Though the accident was in no way his fault my father reddened and reddened, transmitting feverish embarrassment, as though he were apologizing to the universe for having done anything so thoughtless as allowing his car to be hit. How he apologized to the other driver, too, my grim bitter father! It's all right, it's all right, accidents can happen—you mustn't feel upset about it, see, we're all okay! I feared my father was going to give him money for the repairs, but my mother, fearing the same thing, headed him off at the pass. A week later he was still embarrassed—I popped into his mind while he was talking with a friend and found him trying to pretend my mother had been driving, which was absurd—she never had a license—and then I felt embarrassed for him. Judith, too, when her marriage broke up, when she walked out on an impossible situation, registered enormous grief over the shameful fact that someone so purposeful

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and effective in life as Judith Hannah Selig should have entered into a lousy, murderous marriage which had to be terminated vulgarly in the divorce courts. Ego, ego, ego. I, the miraculous mind-reader, entering upon a mysterious decline, apologize for my carelessness. I have misplaced my gift somewhere. Will you forgive me?

Good, to forgive;
Best, to forget!
Living, we fret;
Dying, we live.

TAKE an imaginary letter, Mr. Selig. Harrumph. Miss Kitty Holstein, Something West Sixty-something Street, New York City. Check the address later. Don't bother about the zipcode.

Dear Kitty:

I know you haven't heard from me in ages but I think now it's appropriate to try to get in touch with you again. Thirteen years have passed and a certain maturity must have come over both of us, I think, healing old wounds and making communication possible. Despite all hard feelings that may once have existed between us I never lost my fondness for you, and you remain bright in my mind.

Speaking of my mind, there's something I ought to tell you. I no longer do things very well with it. By "things" I mean the mental deal, the mind-reading trick, which of course I couldn't do on you in any case, but which defined and shaped my relationship to everybody else in the world. This power seems to be slipping away from me now. It caused us so much grief, remember? It was what ultimately split us up, as I tried to explain in my last letter to you, the one you never answered. In another year or so—who knows, six months, a month, a week?—it will be totally gone and I will be just an ordinary human being like yourself. I will be a freak no longer. Perhaps then there will be an opportunity for us to resume the relationship that was interrupted in 1963 and to reestablish it on a more realistic footing.

I know I did dumb things then. I pushed you mercilessly. I refused to accept you for yourself and tried to make something else out of you, something freakish, in fact, something just like myself. I had good reasons in theory for attempting that, I thought then, but of course they were wrong, they had to be wrong and I never saw that until it was too late. To

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you I seemed domineering, overpowering, dictatorial—me, mild self-effacing me! Because I was trying to transform you. And eventually I bored you. Of course you were very young then, you were—shall I say it?—shallow, unformed, and you resisted me. But now that we're both adults we might be able to make a go of it.

I hardly know what my life will be like as an ordinary human being unable to enter minds. Right now I'm floundering, looking for definitions of myself, looking for structures. I'm thinking seriously of entering the Roman Catholic Church. . .

(Good Christ, am I? That's the first I've heard of that! The stink of incense, the mumble of priests, is that what I want?)

Or perhaps the Episcopalian, I don't know. It's a matter of affiliating myself with the human race. And also I want to fall in love again. I want to be part of someone else. I've already begun tentatively, timidly getting in touch with my sister Judith again after a whole lifetime of warfare. We're starting to relate to each other for the first time and that's encouraging to me. But I need more—a woman to love, not just sexually but in all ways. I've really had that only twice in my life, once with you, once about five years later with a girl named Toni who wasn't very much like you, and both times this power of mine ruined things—once because I got too close with it, once because I couldn't get close enough. As the power slips away from me, as it dies, perhaps there's a chance for an ordinary human relationship between us at last, of the kind that ordinary human beings have all the time. For I will be ordinary. For I will be very ordinary.

I wonder about you. You're thirty-five years old now, I think. That sounds very old to me, even though I'm forty-one. (Forty-one doesn't sound old, somehow!) I still think of you as being twenty-two. You seemed even younger than that—sunny, open, naive. Of course that was my fantasy image of you. I had nothing to go by but externals—I couldn't do my usual number on your psyche—and so I made up a Kitty who probably wasn't the real Kitty at all. Anyway, so you're thirty-five. I imagine you look younger than that today. Did you marry? Of course you did. A happy marriage? Lots of kids? Are you still married?

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What's your married name, then, and where do you live and how can I find you? If you're married will you be able to see me anyway? Somehow I don't think you would be a completely faithful wife—does that insult you? So there ought to be room in your life for me as a friend—as a lover. Do you ever see Tom Nyquist? Did you go on seeing him for long after you and I broke up? Were you bitter toward me for the things I told you about him in that letter? If your marriage has broken up or if somehow you never married, would you live with me now? Not as a wife, not yet, just as a companion? To help me get through the last phases of what's happening to me? I need help so much. I need love. I know this is a lousy way to go about making a proposition, let alone a proposal—that is by saying: Help me, comfort me, stay with me. I'd rather reach to you in strength than in weakness. But right now I'm weak. There's this globe of silence growing in my head, expanding, expanding, filling my whole skull, creating this big empty place. I'm suffering a slow reality leakage. I can only see the edges of things, not their substance, and now the edges are getting indistinct, too. Oh, Christ. Kitty I need you. Kitty how will I find you? Kitty I hardly knew you. Kitty Kitty Kitty.

Twang. The plangent chord. *Twing.* The breaking string. *Twong.* The lyre untuned. *Twang. Twing. Twong.*

DEAR children of God, my sermon this morning will be a very short one. I wish only that you should ponder and meditate the deep meaning and mystery of a few lines I intend to rip off the saintly Tom Eliot, a thoughtful guide for troubled times. Beloved,

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BOB GUINN

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I direct you to his *Four Quartets,* to his paradoxical line, "In my beginning is my end," which he amplifies some pages later with the comment, "What we call the beginning is often the end/ And to make an end is to make a beginning." Some of us are ending right now, dear children, that is to say, aspects of lives that once were central to the possessors are drawing to a close. Is this an end or is it a beginning? Can the end of one thing not be the beginning of another? I think so, beloved ones. I think that the closing of a door does not preclude the opening of a different door. Of course, it takes courage to walk through that new door when we do not know what may lie beyond it, but one who has faith need have no fears. Our lives are pilgrimages. We may die small deaths every day, but we are reborn from death to death, until at last we go into the dark, into the vacant interstellar spaces where He awaits us—and why should we fear if He is there? And until that time comes let us live our lives without giving way to the temptation to grieve for ourselves. Remember always that the world still is full of wonders, that there are always new quests, that seeming ends are not ends in truth, but only transitions, stations by the way. Why should we mourn? Why should we give ourselves over to sorrow, though our lives be daily subtractions? If we lose *this,* do we also lose *that*? If sight goes, does love go also? If feeling grows faint, may we not return to old feelings and draw comfort from them? Much of our pain is mere confusion.

Be then of good cheer on this Our Lord's day, beloved ones, and spin no snares in which to catch yourselves, nor allow yourselves the self-indulgent sin of misery, and make no false distinctions between ends and beginnings, but go onward, ever searching, to new ecstasies, to new communions, to new worlds, and give no space in your soul to fear, but yield yourself up to the Peace of Christ and await that which must come. . .

Now comes a dark equinox out of its proper moment. The bleached moon glimmers like a wretched old skull. The leaves shrivel and fall. The fires die down. The dove, wearying, flutters to earth. Darkness spreads. Everything blows away. The purple blood falters in the narrowing veins; the chill impinges on the straining heart; the soul dwindles; even the feet become untrustworthy. Words fail. Our guides admit they are lost. That which has been solid grows transparent. Things pass away. Colors fade. This is a gray time and I fear it will be grayer still one of these days. Tenants of the house, thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.

TO BE CONCLUDED

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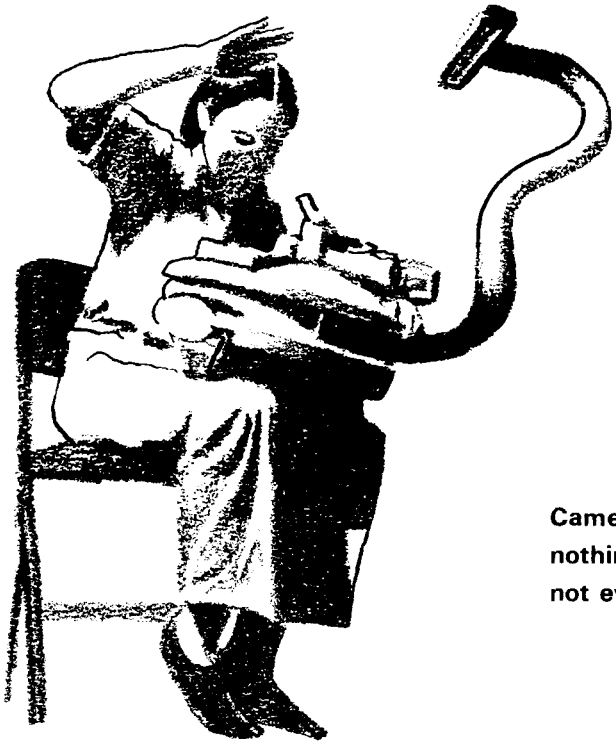

Came the time nothing worked—not even humans!

FAREWELL TO THE ARTIFACTS

SANDY FISHER

AT TWO A.M., the phone woke me. The caller was Emelin and before he had gotten out two words I knew that he was extremely annoyed. "Damn it, Poekel," he shouted down the wire, "your vacuum cleaner is over here trying to mount Phyl's sewing machine."

I winced inwardly. Sighing, I said, "Look, Harry, it's young—it just doesn't know any better."

"I realize it doesn't know any better, but look—I still don't like that going on in front of the kids."

"Well, I'll be right there and bring it back."

I got out of bed and threw on some clothes. Martha sat up and looked at me sleepily. "It's noth-

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ing," I told her. "The vacuum cleaner got out again."

"Did it go over to the Emelins'?" she asked, brushing the hair out of her eyes.

"It's over there now, humping their sewing machine."

She made a disgusted sound, lying down and turning over.

I turned out the bedroom light, went downstairs quietly to avoid waking the kids, opened the front door. The night chill cleaned my throat, my breath making little puffs of frost in the streetlights. I trotted over to the Emelins'. The porch light was on and Harry was waiting for me outside.

"Awfully sorry," I said ruefully as I panted up the porch steps.

"Can't you keep the door locked?" Harry asked.

"I do. The damn thing's learned how to undo the latch."

"You probably don't punish it properly."

We went inside. Phyllis, Harry's wife, met us in the hallway, wrapped in a robe.

"Hi, Poke," she said. "I'm sorry Harry was so short on the phone, but I really blew up and upset him. I guess the thing startled me."

"That's okay," I said. "Where is it?"

She glanced toward the kitchen. "Well, it sort of gave up on the sewing machine. Now it's sort of sniffing around the kitchen."

"What's it looking for?"

"I'm damned if I know."

We marched into the kitchen, Phyllis leading the way. Sure enough, the vacuum was working its way down the side wall, its hose snuffling along the baseboard crack. "Come on, Herman," I said. "Time to go home." I scooped it up in my arms and it began to snuffle my ear. "It didn't dirty the house or anything, did it?" I asked on the way to the door.

"Oh, no," Phyllis said. "It just startled me, getting in like that."

"Maybe it got in when you opened the door for something else."

She shook her head. "I would have seen it."

"Well, we can talk about it tomorrow. Sorry again, Phyllis. 'Night, Harry."

" 'Night, Poke."

They watched me down the steps, then closed the door. A minute later the porch light went out. I homed on our porch light, holding the gently squirming vacuum cleaner in my arms. "A hell of a thing to do," I said to it. "Why the hell won't you stay home?"

Obviously it wanted a mate. On top of that it seemed to be a little confused about its identity. A sewing machine—now that was pretty far-fetched. Since this

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whole peculiar business had begun a few weeks ago I had been a little nervous about what appliance was going to start up next. Some could be downright uncomfortable to have clomping around the house. The furnace, for example.

I dropped the vacuum gently on the kitchen floor. "Now, listen," I told it. "No more funny business tonight. You go to sleep—over here, on your beddy-bye." I indicated the pile of old clothes I'd made into a sort of nest.

The vacuum trundled over to the pile, obediently hopped on it and tucked its hose around itself.

I got softhearted. Rummaging around in the canisters on the sideboard, I came up with a handful of peanuts. "Here," I said, holding them out on my palm. "Peace offering."

The vacuum snaked its hose over to my hand, investigated delicately, then snorked up the peanuts. Then it whuffled appreciatively, snugged down on the clothing and went inert.

"I bet you're faking," I said to it, "but stay out of trouble anyway."

I went out, closed the kitchen door and turned out the light. Then I locked the cellar door and put the key on top of the door frame. I spent a few minutes at the front door, trying to figure a way to lock it so that the clever little devil couldn't open it. Finally I reopened the basement door, went downstairs, pawed through a couple of dingy bottles of nails and screws and came up with a plastic baggie containing a hook and eye. I took it back upstairs and installed it on the front door, well up near the top corner where the vacuum couldn't reach it.

When I got back into bed Martha asked sleepily, "Did it break anything?"

"Uh-uh."

"Wee-wee all over the living room rug?"

"Of course not. How could it?"

"How the hell would I know? It's pretty good at almost everything else."

I grunted, turned off the light.

WE WERE having our coffee next morning when the phone rang. "Morning," I said absently into it.

"Mr. Poekel, this is the *Los Angeles Times*. I wonder if you'd mind talking to one of our people about what's happening out there?"

"Listen, I'm sorry if you've been misled," I said into the handset. "There's nothing going on here at all. Somebody's playing a practical joke on you and you ought to get wise to it."

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"Come off it, Mr. Poekel."

"God's honest truth," I said. "Listen, one of my neighbors, Harry Emelin, is playing a practical joke on me by telling everybody that I'm building robots here. There isn't a word of truth in the story." Idly I watched the coffee pot climb down into the sink, push the tap open with its spout and wallow contentedly in the water.

"Is that a fact?"

"Fact. Listen, fellas, I'm just a plain old funeral director, just another joe trying to live my life and make a buck. This sort of publicity is bad for business. You know how quiet the profession is supposed to be.

"I didn't realize that."

"Matter of fact," I said, warming to my subject, "the board of examiners is considering censuring me because of all the publicity this joke has been giving me. I would appreciate it if you boys would give me a break." I didn't quite cry into the phone. Martha nodded approvingly.

"Well, we really didn't have any idea . . . good authority . . . we thought . . . sorry to bother you."

"No trouble. And thank you so much for your cooperation. If you ever need anything in my line don't hesitate to call. I'll return your kindness a thousandfold. They say I'm quite an artist."

"Uh, thanks."

"Don't mention it." I hung up.

"Wasn't that a little thick?" Martha asked.

"Nah."

"Suppose they think to check that funeral director thing?"

I slapped my forehead, which emitted a sound like a smitten cantaloupe. "Migod!"

"I'll cover for you," the love of my life said sweetly. "If they call back I'll tell them you've gone out of town."

"For what?"

"For a mortician's convention." She stood up, walked to the sink, picked up the coffee pot, paddled it and put it back on the sideboard, where it bobbled behind a canister of coffee to sulk. She sighed, took a sponge and began to wipe the sink—the walls around it and the floor in front of it were covered with water that the coffee pot had splashed up.

The phone rang again. Martha put down the sponge and answered. I mooched up behind her, put my arms around her and let my nose rest on her head. Her hair smelled of a curious, morning-chores mix of perfume and dishpan detergent. Reaching around behind herself, she dug me in the ribs with a forefinger. "Just a minute, I'll see if he's available," she said into the phone.

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I shook my head emphatically. She covered the mouthpiece. "It's the Monsignor What's-his-face," she hissed.

"Oh," I said, accepting the phone. Martha uttered a little yip of surprise—the vacuum had experimentally snuffled her thigh. She slapped at it. It shrank away, went about its business of snuffling around the baseboards.

"Hello," I said warily into the phone.

"Monsignor Scopazzi here," a fruity voice said into my ear.

"Good to hear from you," I said absently.

"Yes. Well, regarding your situation over there, I feel confident that something can be done."

"Glad to hear it."

"Yes. Of course, I don't do that sort of thing myself, but I think that we can put you in touch with someone who is equipped to handle it."

"Great. When can I talk to him?"

The fruity voice chuckled, making me think of Orson Welles as Cardinal Richelieu. "Patience, patience, my boy. Exorcists don't grow on trees, not any more. We live in an enlightened era."

I looked over at the sideboard, where the toaster and the can opener were fighting over a loaf of bread. "Not enlightened enough for me."

"Rather than my bothering you again with unessential details, my office will take care of getting someone to you."

"Look, I appreciate this, but isn't there some way you can get him over here right away?"

"You sound quite disturbed," the phone said. Monsignor, my eye!

"I am quite disturbed."

There was a longish pause. "Well, then," the voice came back, "we'll see if something can be done later today. The person in question is somewhere in the Los Angeles area at this moment, I believe. Yes. We'll be in touch shortly."

"Thank you very much."

"Don't mention it. Oh, incidentally, I would appreciate the favor of being allowed to be present during the—ah—services."

"Oh?" The telephone was innocent—this was the Monsignor. I called to Martha, "What do we have to offer a Monsignor for dinner?"

"Will he eat Pedernales chili?" she called back.

"He'd better." Into the phone I said, "No trouble at all, Monsignor, we'd be delighted to have you make it for dinner. That's always a lively time."

"Thank you. The—ah—visitations sound most intriguing. Until later, then."

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I HUNG up the wall handset, went to the sideboard and took the loaf of bread away from the toaster and the can opener.

"What do you do to make a Monsignor feel at home?" Martha asked.

"You could start by hiding the menorah."

The doorbell chimed. I went to answer it while Martha started on the dishes. I remembered to unfasten the hook and eye at the top of the door.

"Mister Poekel?" the guy with the notepad said.

"Who?" I asked.

"Poekel, William J.? Having some sort of funny trouble with your appliances?"

I looked over his shoulder. At the curb stood one of those fairly new, nondescript, low-priced cars, unmarked, with a buggywhip antenna on the rear fender.

"Sorry," I said. "Poekel used to live here a few months back, but he's moved. Funny little guy."

"Is that so?"

"Oh, sure. He used to live in a little room in the attic. The missus and I were never sure when he went in or out. A little strange, maybe, but always polite and he always paid his rent on time."

The guy's face fell. "You don't know where we might be able to find him?"

"Sorry," I said, "I haven't the faintest idea."

"Could you give me a description of him?"

"Oh, I don't know," I mused. "He looks pretty ordinary. Maybe five feet four or five, sort of stooped over, you know? And he has a cast in one eye."

The guy glanced back at the car, then at me. "Well, thanks a lot, fella."

"Don't mention it. Say, while you're here, could I interest you in a brand-new, complete set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica?* It's the universal reference source of a thousand uses. I can get you a real good price."

"Uh, no, thanks. I've got to get back to the paper."

"Well, if you change your mind be sure to let me know. You really don't know what you're missing."

"You sell those things?"

"Best damn salesman in the West, the missus tells me. She says if I keep up at this rate I'll be division manager by next year. Yes, sir. Then I could really get you a break."

"Uh, that's great."

"Be sure to keep in touch now. The name's Hendrickson, Claude Hendrickson. Here's my phone number. Think it over and get in touch." I wrote out a number and handed it to him, clapped him on

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the shoulder. "Maybe you could use a little knowledge."

"Yeah. So long," he said, backing down the steps.

"Don't be a stranger now, y'hear?"

I watched him get back into the car and drive away. He didn't stop at other houses on the block. That gave me more time.

I WAS about to go back in when Harry Emelin came over. We said, "Hi—" and walked into the kitchen. Martha was just paddling the can opener, which had gotten into the refrigerator and overturned the milk. She looked at me in despair. "We've got to stop this," she said.

Harry said, "Hi, Martha."

"Hi, Harry. I can't offer you anything but instant coffee—the coffee pot keeps emptying itself onto the floor."

"That's okay," Harry said graciously. "Maybe the weather is making it a little rambunctious." We sat down at the table. Martha put water on the stove in a regular pot to boil and sat down with us. She rested her chin on her right hand and put her left hand on my arm.

"Anything new?" Harry asked.

"Not as far as I know."

"The blender," Martha said. "It isn't where I left it last night."

"You think it's walking around?"

"I don't know. Maybe one of the other things pushed it."

"Who was that?" Harry asked.

"Who—wha—?"

"That guy outside."

"Oh, him. I thought he was from the *Times*. That was a *Times* staff car."

"Did you tell him anything?"

"Do you think I'm crazy? And have people crawling all over my home? I told him he had the wrong house and offered to sell him a set of encyclopedias."

"Do you think he was convinced?"

"Sure. I even offered to give him my phone number in case he changed his mind."

"Did you?"

"Well, I gave him a number. If he changes his mind and calls it the Santa Monica ASPCA will give him a hard time. They've never sold encyclopedias."

"Did you follow up that suggestion I made?" Harry said.

"Which one?"

"The one about exorcism."

"Oh. Yeah, I did. I got in touch with the first person who I thought might know—he happened to be a rabbi. He put me on to somebody in comparative mythology at UCSB, who put me onto a priest in Santa Monica. Eventually I seem to have found somebody

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who knows somebody. First I thought the phone was playing tricks—but he's supposed to come by for dinner tonight."

"Mind if I join you?"

"Of course not. If you can take Pedernales chili, that is."

"I suppose I can. Did you check the chart recorder this morning?"

"I did, but it was blank."

"Let's see." He stood up and went to the chart recorder, sitting on the sideboard near the refrigerator. He unsnapped the cover and took it off. Whistling absently, he ran through the calibration. Finally he closed the cover, reattached the snaps and came back to the table. "It works all right. Hum."

"Well," I said, "All that tells us is that there are no electromagnetic fields in the room."

"Other than the normal background RF and sixty-cycle, yes. And it would be okay to guess that very low-frequency stuff couldn't have anything to do with this." He scratched his head. "I'm about out of ideas. I'm glad you found an exorcist."

"I'm not convinced that this is going to work," I said.

"You can always sell the house."

"Thanks a lot."

I rose and moved idly around the kitchen. The sun streamed in through the window over the sink, sending butter-yellow reflections around the clean little room. I looked around. Everything seemed normal, just like in any other tract house, except that, while I watched, the coffee pot got down into the sink again. It nosed the water on, splashed under the faucet and seemed to enjoy itself tremendously.

"Have you been able to come up with anything unusual from back around the time this got started?" Harry asked.

"Not yet. The first thing I remember still happened about a month ago—and it still is just my coming downstairs in the morning and finding the toaster buried in toasted bread. Then there was the night we sat here and watched it open the loaf and fill itself with slices. And after that, the can opener and the coffee pot and the vacuum cleaner—and now, God knows, maybe the blender. And not a clue during the whole time that might give even a hint of an idea as to what's going on."

"What makes you think that exorcism is going to accomplish anything?" Martha asked.

"Well, it's been around for a long time."

"Exorcism, shmexorcism." I paced the kitchen floor. "What I need is results. The good old-fashioned American spirit. No matter how far-fetched living in

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a mechanical menagerie may seem, let no man say that my cause is hopeless."

"I'M AFRAID it's hopeless," Mobutu, the exorcist, said. Dinner was over. It had been lively. He looked up wearily from a litter of arcane paraphernalia.

"What do you mean, hopeless?" Martha asked. "Couldn't you have forgotten something?"

"Well," Mobutu said, getting up from the floor, "while exorcism isn't exactly a full-time profession with me I am still a professional in the business. And in my opinion—exorcism is not the answer to this problem."

Mobutu was about twenty-three, wore a dark, impeccable business suit and an Afro natural. He scratched the natural in bafflement.

"Isn't there anyone else in your department at the university?" Martha asked.

"The university? Oh. No, of course not," Mobutu said. "I'm in the Graduate School of Law. There isn't anyone else over there who knows anything about my field. Unless you feel you could use people without a specific background in exorcism."

"Who have you got?"

"Well, we have two Zen adepts and a member of the Adoratory of Relsa."

"That's tough."

"I figured you'd think so." Mobutu started to pack.

"Say," I asked, "with your background in law, what are you doing in religion? Or is the word occultism?"

"Both are old interests of mine," Mobutu said, still packing. "When I finish my graduate work here at the university I'm moving on to Oxford for another stint. In a few years I'll be the only person in the United States with degrees in both civil and canon law."

"Um."

"I'm sorry that exorcism doesn't work on your—problem."

"That's a polite word for it."

Harry, who had been looking on with interest, said, "Whose fault is that?"

"It's not mine—or I should say, not the fault of the methods of exorcism," Mobutu said carefully. "Rather it indicates that these objects are not being moved by malignant spirits. In other words, there seems to be nothing to exorcise."

"What do we do now?" I asked.

He placed the tips of his fingers carefully together. "Have you tried a child psychologist? Poltergeist phenomena, you know—"

"My kids are not crazy," Martha said testily.

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"That's not what he means," I said.

Mobutu nodded. "No. I simply meant that these phenomena frequently occur around adolescent female children."

Martha looked relieved. "We don't have any girls."

"That's too bad."

"What do you mean, too bad?"

"Well, they might have provided an explanation."

The phone rang. Martha went into the kitchen and picked it up. In a minute she came back into the room. "It's Phyllis, Harry," she said. "You should have asked her to join us."

Harry took the phone. Mobutu started packing up his gear. The Monsignor shooed the vacuum away from under his feet and stood up. "I'm sorry that nothing of more value has come of this," he said. "Nevertheless I have found the visit most—ah—interesting."

Harry came back into the living room. "What's up?" I asked him.

"Phyllis says our sewing machine is out in the living room trying to pull down the curtains."

"My God," the Monsignor said.

"Perhaps," Mobutu mumbled, packing his gear.

In the kitchen Martha let out a tiny shriek. I hurried in, followed by Harry and Mobutu.

Martha was busy disentangling her hair from the telephone, which had reached out and gotten hold of it with its cord. No more telephoning, I thought resignedly. Well, there was always the pay phone in the shopping center.

AT ABOUT three that morning something woke me. The house was full of strange noises—faint squeaks and chitterings, swishes and rattles. Martha awoke, too—I think she had the same feeling I did that something important was happening. We got up, dressed and went downstairs.

In the front hallway all the appliances were milling around the door, the larger ones bumping repeatedly into it, trying to get it open. The vacuum had figured out the hook and eye, but couldn't reach it.

While we stood watching them a rumbling came from the sunporch and the color TV rolled in on its casters and joined the group. They clustered around the door like animals trying to escape a zoo.

Martha looked at me. I looked at her.

"I suppose if they want out that badly we ought to let them out," she said.

I nodded. I pushed my way through the crowd, undid the hook and opened the door. The bunch

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of them pushed and shoved their way out and down the steps. I was just beginning to worry about the neighbors when I saw that I didn't have to. Lights were on up and down the street. People were milling around in their underwear, shouting and screaming, and everywhere I looked there were moving appliances, some scuttling underfoot like rats, their chrome glittering in the streetlights.

I looked around. Harry's light was on. I grabbed Martha's hand and started over there. Halfway I met Harry.

"I tried phoning you when it started," Harry said, "but the phone's gone, too."

"Gone?"

"Nothing left but a wire sticking out of the wall. It rode out on my mobile wet bar."

"Rode?"

"Like that." He pointed down the street. About a hundred feet away a combination TV-magazine rack was trundling by, its top and racks filled with smaller appliances. Farther away, at the cross streets, a river of small objects was moving resolutely west. I looked the other way. The same thing was going on down there. The appliances in the street were moving randomly toward one intersection or the other, but once they reached a crossing they turned west.

A loud crash sounded behind us, followed by the crunching of timbers. Harry's Austin America emerged from its shattered garage doors and moved toward the road. A few seconds later I heard other crashes. The street began to fill with cars. Some people tried to open the doors and put on brakes. A few succeeded. The rest of the cars began to move down the street, the smaller appliances scuttling to right or left to keep out of the way. Regretfully I watched our VW camper trundle by. I could have stopped it, but I had a definite feeling about leaving well enough alone.

"We'd better get out of the street," I said to Martha. "The cars might not see us."

She nodded, looking around speechlessly. Phyllis came up and took Harry's hand. Harry and I looked at each other and without words came to the same conclusion. There was a big condominium on La Cienega, not far away. The four of us started over there.

The elevators weren't running, as we had sort of expected. We climbed the sixteen or so flights to the sundeck. On the way we passed hordes of things going the other way—toasters, coffee pots, TV sets, refrigerators, radios, stereos—inching or rolling or crawling their way down the steps.

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Larger ones with wheels were always covered with smaller hitchhikers. They ignored us or nosed at us inquiringly. We stepped carefully around them.

We made it to the sundeck and looked around. The deck was already crowded with people. They looked down uncomprehendingly.

The moonlight and streetlights showed a river of metal moving slowly and steadily toward the ocean. Houses stood out like little islands in the current. The roads and sidewalks and front lawns were solidly filled with moving shapes. The streets were sidewalk to sidewalk with cars, their lights out, moving slowly west. Distantly we could hear screams and the sound of smashing glass.

Then, while we watched, all the lights in sight went out. A tremendous quiet settled over everything as thousands of vent fans and the air-conditioners—whatever ones were left—sighed to a stop. I suddenly had a flash of huge, impossibly massive generators heaving themselves up—to the panic of the operating engineers—and ponderously moving west to the accompaniment of rending girders and falling power lines. From below, the noise of things crawling purposefully through the streets—millions of them—came through clearly and distantly, like the sound of an auditorium filling. In every direction, as far as we could see, the full moon picked up things in motion, all heading west.

About five miles west was the Pacific Ocean.

Martha, Harry, Phyllis and I sort of looked at each other. Then we grabbed each other by the shoulders in a little circle, there on the roof among people shouting and arguing with each other, and we smiled. It was like New Year's Eve. Something was happening and we didn't know what it was—but it looked interesting.

ALONG about six-thirty we walked home. The streets were fairly clear by then, but we still had to avoid an occasional power tool crunching along—like the drill press I almost barked my shin on—and sometimes we had to step out of the way of a dishwasher rumbling by on its plastic wheels. The sky was streaked with red and as the sun broke above the horizon Harry said, "Look there!"

We looked at the sky. High overhead were what looked like thousands of tiny birds—commercial airliners, empty of passengers I hoped, flying west. Below them, rising in flocks above the trees, streaming from houses and build-

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ings, were thousands and thousands of small, birdlike things, flapping madly for altitude, curved necks stretched eagerly toward the ocean.

They were coathangers. Flocks of coathangers.

For a while the sky was dark with them and the whipping sound of their flight was clear and shrill in the morning air.

Martha and I stopped and held hands while the coathangers flew over. We suddenly realized, with a sort of quiet finality, that we were watching the last man-made objects that we were likely to see in the sky for a long time.

Here and there on the street were smashed appliances. A few people who had gotten to their cars were trying to start them, but with no luck. It dawned on me that they would never get them started, that these cars were dead—really dead. Somehow, in some way that I didn't understand—and neither would the engineers—the cars and other things that had not joined the migration would never work again.

The four of us entered our living room. The house was eerily quiet—dead and deserted. Martha went into the kitchen to make some coffee, but the kitchen, of course, was empty. The coffeemaker was

★ ★ ★ GALAXY STARS ★ ★ ★

David Gerrold, now in his late twenties, says, "I still don't know what I'm going to be when I grow up. I never really knew I wanted to be a writer—but then again, I never really knew I wanted to be anything else."

Raised in Los Angeles, David confesses to a precocious love for the motion picture art. "Everything," he says, "revolved around the movies. I wanted to see them, make them, act in them. I wanted to make movies so bad, my parents had to ask my permission to use their own movie camera."

David holds a B.A. Degree in Theater Arts. "The most important thing I learned is that unless you have a story, you might as well not even put film in the camera. Everything starts with the story." His first break came in 1966 when Gene Coon, then producer of STAR TREK, was impressed with one of David's outlines. Coon asked him to submit others, one of which eventually became "The Trouble With Tribbles"—ranking among the show's most popular episodes. The script was David's first sale as a science-fiction writer—and it later garnered a Hugo nomination. Since then, he has sold numerous short stories to *GALAXY* and *IF*, plus several novels and anthologies to Ballantine, Random House and other leading publishing houses.

"I don't consider myself specifically a science-fiction writer," David sums up. "But when you have all time and all space to mess around in, the temptation to do so is irresistible. I write to express my feelings, and writing helps me understand what I'm feeling and why. My *Harlie* stories are good examples. If the reader is entertained, then they are good stories—but if he feels something of what I felt in the writing, then I'm a good writer."

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gone—also the stove, the refrigerator, the blender, the toaster and the can opener. A broken wire sticking out of a discolored spot on the wall was all that was left of the telephone. I knew it was the same way in the rest of the house, probably in the rest of the world—although it would take us a damn long time to find out.

Martha came back with a can of coffee and a kettle. "How about building us a fire?" she asked.

I got some wood from the box and Harry laid some kindling and in a few minutes we had a cheery little blaze in the fireplace. Martha rigged up a pothook out of dead old wire magazine rack and in a few minutes we had coffee—bitter and too strong, maybe, but coffee. On a hunch I went to the sunporch and sure enough—behind the couch was the old guitar I used to play. I brought it in, reflecting that all the electric instruments had probably gone with everything else. I sat down on the floor and, in an experimental mood, strummed a chord and hummed a few notes. The guitar sounded fine. Phyllis hummed along for a few seconds.

"Well," Harry said, looking around, "here we are."

"Here we are," I agreed.

"I wonder what it's going to be like now?" Phyllis said.

"I don't know," I said, "But it sure as hell is going to be interesting."

Harry started to laugh.

"What's so funny?" Martha asked.

"I was thinking that in a few minutes it'll be time to go to work." He chuckled. "Telephoning orders, using the adding machine, making Xeroxes, programing the computer."

"Why not take the day off?" Martha asked.

We all laughed. Then, as it hit us, we laughed harder until our sides hurt. When the merriment died down and we were merely chuckling occasionally, Phyllis said, "We can make a great breakfast over that fire."

"Let's do it," Martha said.

They went to rummage through the pile of food that the refrigerator had left in the middle of the kitchen floor. Harry squatted down in front of the fire and warmed his hands. His face looked unusually peaceful.

"What's on your mind?" I asked him.

He grinned. "Growing food."

I picked up the guitar again and strummed at it. I reflected that I needed quite a bit of practice before I'd be any good.

But I didn't have to hurry. I had all the time in the world. ★

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GALAXY BOOKSHELF

Theodore Sturgeon

First Person Peculiar by T. L. Sherred. Ballantine.
Good Neighbors and Other Strangers by Edgar Pangborn. Macmillan.
The Terminal Man by Michael Crichton. Knopf.
Earth by Marie C. Farca. Doubleday.
The Falling Astronauts by Barry N. Malzberg. Ace.
The Heiros Gamos of Sam and An Smith by Josephine Saxton. Curtis.
Group Feast by Josephine Saxton. Doubleday.
The Edict by Max Ehrlich. Bantam.
Cyborg by Martin Caiden. Arbor House.
Tarzan Alive by Philip José Farmer. Doubleday.
Alpha Two Ed. Robert Silverberg. Ballantine.
The General Zapped an Angel by Howard Fast. Ace.
The Compleat Werewolf by Anthony Boucher. Ace.
The Venus Factor Ed. Vic Ghidalia and Roger Elwood. Macfadden.
Ultimate World by Hugo Gernsback. Walker.

WILL you bear with me through two reminiscences?

In the late 'forties my roommate (and finest friend) was L. Jerome Stanton, who for a while was John Campbell's assistant on *Astounding*. A man of wide tolerance and forbearance, he had one crotchet: he could not abide wild and hysterical enthusiasms. People who oh-boyed and gee-whizzed up the walls and across the ceiling were, to him, exterminable. Imagine my surprise one night to hear from his room a ululating war-whoop and the pounding of feet—he exploded into the living room waving a manuscript and crying, "Read this—read this." When I could, I did. The story was from the slush pile—

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irreverent editors' cant for unsolicited manuscripts—and was the work of an unknown called T. L. Sherred, and the title was *E for Effort*. If you've read it you know its pace and power and clean, clean style—if you haven't I envy you that first experience. Here's a man who has something very important to say and says it well and truly. But the manuscript had one quality which you won't see. It may have been a peculiarity of the typewriter Sherred was using, or the way he used it, but every word was speed-blurred, carrying a faint comet-tail blur to the left. Nothing could have been more appropriate to the story, and it's a shame it wasn't photo-repro'd for the magazine instead of having been type-set. With awe in his voice the phlegmatic Stanton said "It's paced like a drunk falling downstairs." Well—it is indeed and you'll find it in *First Person, Peculiar*, subtitled *How first can a peculiar person get?*—along with three other novelettes: *Cure Guaranteed, Eye for Iniquity* and *Cue for Quiet*. There are similarities among these, but let that pass. Sherred is like a superb marksman with a superb weapon. It's his targets that differ widely—and he does not miss.

One further note on Sherred: in the "Afterword" for his story in Ellison's huge *Again Dangerous Visions*, Sherred says flatly that he will write no more. If ever there were cause for a letter campaign, this is it. Sherred, take it back.

Reminiscence the second: About 1950 Groff Conklin and I gave a new editor a helping hand with the slush pile for a new magazine—H. L. Gold and *Galaxy* respectively. It was a Sunday night and I had read something beetween a quarter-million and 300,000 words since Friday. I was weary and gritty-eyed and the one thing I didn't need was another story. But I picked up that just-one-more, you know, to glance at it. . .

About an hour later I woke my wife. I had tears on my face. "Read this. Just read this." And I got on the phone. It took the better part of another hour to get through to a tiny town near Albany and I finally found myself talking to a quiet, unresponsive and completely unrevealing voice, very unexcited at having been called at 3 ack emma.

"Edgar Pangborn?"

"Yes."

"Hey, I've just read your *Angel's Egg*. It's just beautiful. It's one of the most beautiful things I've ever read!"

"Thanks."

And that was about it. I've since come to know Edgar Pangborn quite well. He is very shy and

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quiet and one of the sharpest and most sensitive observers of people, motives, love, loss and pain in all the world. As you'll see for yourself in the long-awaited, much-needed Pangborn collection *Good Neighbors and Other Strangers*, which is *Angel's Egg* and ten other delightful, moving, startling, provocative and/or gently funny stories.

NOW I've reminisced myself out of justice-space and must be unjustly brief with these:

The chief defect of *The Terminal Man* is *The Andromeda Strain*—and I freely concede that it's hard to be more unjust to a book than to judge it by the merits of some other book. But if a man writes a block-busting runaway best-seller he has put himself in a different country. Anyway, in the long run the comparison is fair. *The Andromeda Strain* dealt with something that threatened all humanity—*The Terminal Man* deals with one man's disaster, and Crichton does not make of his tortured Harry Benson, an epileptic, the kind of man one can identify with, care about, fascinating as his case may be. Aside from this cavil, the book is well enough wrought.

There are few joys greater in this assignment than to run into a really fine first by a new name. The name is Marie C. Farca and her book is called *Earth*—and if she gets any better than this she will be right in the superstar category. She has drawn a comparison between two Earths—either of which, in her far future, may be the original one—one of which has progressed to the highest technological achievement; the other has been all but killed by pollution. On the latter, under a dome, is a village, and we get to spend most of the book there, getting to know the people. Her method is to illustrate extremes and to indicate the middle way, as the best of ancient Greek philosophy once did. These two planets have a great deal to learn from one another and in the end there's a strong chance that they will. As for her protagonist, Ames—for all he is from a most remote future, he is indeed someone the reader can give a damn about.

Barry N. Malzberg has pushed down again on his detonator and exploded us another novel, *The Falling Astronauts*. Again he is grinding his teeth at, and on, NASA, its efforts and its postures. This is an examination-in-depth of the third man on an Apollo project, who has to mind the store while the two others make their marks on the surfaces of Luna and the history books. He is obsessed by

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the notion of blasting off and leaving them there. Malzberg pulls you right inside the skin of this bumbling, tilted, angry astronaut and through him alone (for what real suspense do NASA procedures leave a viewer?) creates all the terror and wonder that the space program has robbed from us. I think I have finally isolated the uniqueness of Malzberg. There have been angry writers before—and black humorists—but their mark seems always to have been a kind of snobbishness: I-know-something-you-don't-know. Malzberg gives a voice to the mixed-up, the impotent, to the torment of helplessness—and to the peculiar hope that personal integrity, even if it be irrational or wrong-headed, may just possibly be able to beat the system.

AND speaking of the unique—let me again make the distinction between an original book and a unique one. Mickey Spillane, as a good example, wrote the original Mickey Spillane kind of book. Immediately he and others could repeat the trick.

But unique books cannot be redone by anyone, not even by a very short shelf indeed—and they are very, very good. Such a book is Josephine Saxton's *The Heiros Gamos of Sam and An Smith*, which, as it happens, I missed in hardcover but which can now be had in paperback. It's a tale or a fable and an adventure or a parable. It's frightening and tender and puzzling and provocative—in short, it will give you back in full measure what you're capable of bringing to it and if you don't get anything out of it it's your fault, not the book's. You'll participate in this one or you won't. If you don't, I'm sorry—it's your great lack and your loss. Ms. Saxton's new one is *Group Feast*, the bare bones of which are these—the wealthiest woman in the world decides to throw a party in the most incredible house ever built—and she does and it's a whing-ding you'll never forget.

Max Ehrlich, sparkplug-in-chief of Zero Population Growth, turns out to be a writer of great competence. The "edict" in his book commands that there be no more births for thirty years. If there is one, the baby dies and so do both parents. The edict is cushioned with a social system of superficial liberality where sex is easy to come by (a great phrase, that) and even the pregnancy experience is acceptable—provided it's terminated. The book (and I hate to be this brief) is the story of a couple who decided to

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go through with one. Warmly recommended.

We are about to be swamped by cyborgs—cybernetic organisms, people (usually) who are partly machines. One new TV series with this theme is already on the air and I know of three more in preparation. An archetype of the concept is Martin Caiden's *Cyborg*, which deals with a test-pilot/astronaut of the stamp that bugs Malzberg so much, who flies an experimental rocket plane into the Mohave Desert and leaves both legs and an arm in the wreckage. These, and a number of other replacements and improvements, are brought to a new optimum and we have a superman superspy. Caiden is a science writer of enormous competence, and the account of his hero's reconstruction is absolutely fascinating. His subsequent adventures as a CIA superweapon are great if that's your thing. His development as a human being is something Caiden tries very hard to do well—and doesn't—but if you're gadget-happy that won't matter.

Tarzan Alive, subtitled *A Definitive Biography of Lord Greystroke,* is a labor of love by sf's greatest lover, Philip Josè Farmer. With dumfounding energy and high good humor he has produced a veritable Ph.D. thesis on the real Tarzan, who of course is alive and very busy to this day. With great gobbets of cross-reference and footnotes, addenda and bibliographies, Farmer traces the life history of the man on whom E. R. Burroughs patterned his Tarzan character. A delightful, colossal, stupendous book.

Worthy collections, anthologies and reprints (and I weep at having to be this brief): Silverberg's antho *Alpha Two*—ten fine stories and a Best Buy. *The General Zapped an Angel*—nine literate and potent short stories by Howard Fast. Anthony Boucher's *The Compleat Werewolf*—ten by the late and wonderful Anthony Boucher, including most of his *Unknown* stories. *The Venus Factor,* featuring female writers instead of just writers, but anyway worth the price and more because it has Judy Merril and C. L. Moore and Zenna Henderson. There are also quainties by the likes of Agatha Christie, Cynthia Asquith and Gertrude Atherton—and speaking of quaint, I must urge you to get *Ultimate World,* by Hugo Gernsback. If you want to see what the first twenty years of American sf read like here it is—and don't scoff. Gernsback's still good for about four valid story ideas per page. This is not, by the way, a reprint—it's a posthumous first edition. A curiosity and a treasure. ★

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April, Year One

JACKSON CANUTE, on that terrible morning, faced three things he did not want to face.

One, his baby-food business would have practically no customers in less than two years.

Two, the probabilities were that he was not one of the naturally resistant. According to the latest information only one in 20,000 persons had not been rendered permanently sterile.

Three, like almost every adult he was experiencing the end-of-the-world syndrome, as it was to be called.

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PHILIP JOSÈ FARMER

SEVENTY YEARS OF DECPOP

. . . And what were you doing on the day when the population imploded?

Number three he thought he could handle. He had always prided himself on his self-control, his flexibility, his adaptability.

Number two? He would not know whether or not he was sterile until he took the test Clabb had described in his letters.

Number one? Conversion.

But his wife, Ellen, was phoning him and he knew by her whiteness, her drawn face, her wide eyes, that she was going to be hysterical about all three and nasty about number two.

His secretary, Jessica, had asked him if she should put the call through and he had said she should.

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Get It Over With was his philosophy.

He pressed the button and Ellen asked, "Why did you take so long about answering?"

"You're not the only one shaken up," he said. "I heard the news on the radio just before I drove into the parking lot."

"It's awful, isn't it?" she said. "Just terrible! Horrible!"

"If it's true," Jackson said.

"It certainly is true!" Her voice rose, fluttering like a frightened bird. "They verified all the important things before they released the news. How do you explain the sudden drop in pregnancies in the last four months? It was all Clabb's* doing! He explained the whole thing in his letter—the one they read. How he built toy factories all over the world, except in the Iron Curtain countries, and how only he knew that the aerosol he'd had his scientists make was being blown out into the winds and carried all over the world and how it affected only man and the higher apes and how only one person in twenty thousand—"

"Clabb's letter was read over the radio and I heard it again on the TV in my office."

"They say Clabb has disappeared. No one has the slightest idea of where he went."

"Naturally," Jackson said.

"Please come home," Ellen said. "I'm just about to go to pieces."

"I was planning on coming home—was just going to call you," he said. It was evident that she meant to wait until he got home before she reproached him. "But first I have to make some calls. It takes time and money to convert a business and—"

"What do you mean?"

He explained and she said, "What if you can't get a loan to change over? Nobody's going to want to invest in the future because the future isn't going to exist. It—"

"You're getting hysterical."

He regretted saying that as soon as he had said it. In Ellen's mind to be accused was to be guilty. She broke up and was still screaming when he cut her off. He checked Dr. Seward's office number but received no answer. He tried the doctor's home. Mrs. Seward answered. Her makeup was wrecked by tears and her slurred speech indicated she had been drinking.

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* Every head of state on Earth received a letter from Jacob Clabb. By the time scientists had determined that Clabb's formula was not a crackpot's work the planet's birthrate had dropped noticeably. There was no longer any reason to suppress the news. Clabb had disappeared without a trace. One theory was that Clabb may have become mentally unbalanced following the Great July Choke in New York City in 1976.

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"Ronald's at General Hospital," she said. "He's got six would-be suicides on his hands and more coming in. And I'm not so sure that I'm not going to be one of his patients if he doesn't come home."

"Call a good doctor," Jackson said, hoping the dry approach would calm her down. And then, seeing her anger, he said, "I'm just kidding, Jane. Look, why don't you go over to my house? You and Ellen can buck up each other until I get home. Or maybe that's not such a good idea. Ellen's no post to lean on just now. Go to Willa's. She's pretty steady."

"She's one of Ronald's pill-takers!" Jane Seward said shrilly. "Good God, man, don't you know this is the end of the road for humanity?"

"I don't know any such thing," Jackson said. "Look, go over and talk to Ellen until I get home. Meanwhile, consider the figures. Even with only one—"

He stopped. She had cut him off. He pressed Jessica's button. "Call my wife. Tell her I'm on my way home now. I will actually be making some phone calls, but they shouldn't take too long. By the way, you look as if you were being sensible about this."

"I'm too numb really to know what's going on inside me," she said. She smiled. She was beautiful enough when her face was composed—when she smiled she was striking.

Her face faded from the screen. He spoke Arnold Rawley's number, but according to his secretary Mr. Rawley was not in. She did not know where he was. He was not at home, because she had called there and his wife had said that he should have been at work.

CANUTE phoned Mike's, a tavern on Highview Road near Highview Woods, where Canute and Rawley lived. Mike's was a small but elegant place. It had become a sort of "neighborhood" tavern. The neighbors were some of the wealthiest and most influential men in Busiris.

Mike answered. In a few seconds Rawley's flushed face was on the screen.

"Jackson!" Arnold said. "Come on down! We're celebrating the end of the world! No more babies! Jesus!" The tears ran down his cheeks.

"You have six children," Canute said. "You've got it made."

"Yeah, but I won't have any grandchildren. They ought to hang Clabb when they find him! No, hanging's too good for him—they ought to crucify him, except that

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would be blasphemous. They ought to nail—"

"Cut it out," Canute said. "Why the hell are you crying in your beer—scotch—anyway at this time of the morning? You don't even know that everything Clabb says is true. With six kids you've got a chance of one's being fertile even if all the claims in those letters are verified. I have work to do and I need you. I want to get started at once to convert—that much I'm sure of. I'm calling an emergency meeting of the board of directors and you should be working out the legal foundations. But you won't be in any shape today, I can see. What about your partner? Is he off on a bender, too?"

"Young Luckenvor? Not that cold fish."

"I'll call him then," Canute said. "I expect to see you sober tomorrow. At eight."

Rawley glared.

"Young Luckenvor's not the only cold fish."

"I can get hysterical with the best of you," Canute said, "when there's occasion for it. It's not as if the sky was falling down, Chicken Licken."

He phoned Rawley's office again. Mrs. Tengrow, the secretary, said that Luckenvor was in the hospital, according to a call she had just received from Mrs. Luckenvor. He had driven into a lamppost, wrecked the car, broken a collarbone and then suffered a broken arm when another car broadsided into his. The other driver had been arrested for drunkenness. Luckenvor had not yet been arrested, though he, too, had been intoxicated—and where was Mr. Rawley?

"Why would Luckenvor be drunk so early in the morning?" Canute asked. "Mrs. Tengrow, when was the news about Clabb's letter first released?"

Mrs. Tengrow was sixty, childless, and did not care much for the direction in which the world had been going for the last forty years.

"Oh, the first announcement was during the late late show."

"Many people must have heard about it before dawn," he said. "But I never thought Luckenvor —" He cut himself short, told Tengrow where she could locate Rawley. "But I advise you not to ask him to come to the office. He should go home. In a taxi."

Mrs. Tengrow pursed her mouth but said nothing.

Canute made several calls to board members, asking them to call others for a meeting at the Golden Boar's Head at the earliest possible moment. His secretary

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would arrange for the private banquet room and take care of other details.

He listened to Jessica on his callbox. She was still talking to Ellen. He turned and went out the back way, though Jessica had probably rotated the phone so that Ellen could not see him if he passed Jessica's desk.

HE WAS glad to see the tall white pillars and reddish-brown roof of his house ahead. Something was uncoiling from the ice-shot mud in his entrails. It was sending vibrations up through his flesh.

Humanquake, he thought. *I wonder what degree this is on the personal Richter scale . . .*

If he could cast his reactions into such channels he was safe from breakup.

He stopped the car on the curving drive, turned off the steam and sat for what seemed a long while behind the wheel. Finally the big carved-oak door opened and Ellen came out. He left the car and walked toward her. She flew to him as if she were a self-thrown basketball, his arms the hoop. He held her for a long while, but, seeing passersby in cars turning their heads to look, he finally released her and urged her into the house. There he did what seemed to him the best way to comfort her—and himself—even though she weakly protested. But she lost her reluctance after a few minutes. She soon understood that they were making the most significant gesture they could—they were, in a sense, shaking their fists or thumbing their noses at the catastrophe that hung over mankind. And there was the hope that this would result in conception and prove that they were not going to share in the larger fate of the world.

CANUTE did not get much accomplished the next day. Rawley could not make it to work. Even if he had not been so hung over he would have stayed home to settle down his wife. The board of directors membership was still suffering from shock and refused to attend a meeting until the numbness wore off.

The third day Jackson took his time leaving the breakfast table. Ellen was fairly calm, though at times her chin would start trembling and tears would appear. They watched the early morning news together. International, national and local news came in that order. Three elephants of bad portent, two holding the tails of their predecessors in their trunks. Most

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programs had been canceled for news or special programs. These consisted largely of "authorities" lecturing or being interviewed or talking with other authorities. There were also views of reactions, public and private, from all over the world.

Shortly before he left for the office Jackson said, "Busiris has a population of about two hundred thousand. That means that only about ten adults in Busiris are naturally resistant. Ten! And if half are women, how many can bear children? A person can be naturally resistant, but that doesn't necessarily mean he or she is fertile."

The President of the United States was to speak at 8:00 P.M. One commentator thought that Lister was sure to make the same announcement as the premier of China and the president of France. They had stated that the FCP, the Fertility Check Project, was mandatory for every citizen between sixteen and fifty. The test itself was a contribution by Clabb, described in one of his letters. A needle dipped in clabbonite—Clabb's own name for it—was drawn across the skin of the arm or hand deep enough to bring blood. Ten minutes later, if the person were naturally resistant to Clabb's aerosol, a red inflammation approximately a centimeter wide would appear on each side of the scratch. Enormous batches of the clabbonite were being prepared by every nation. Public servants were being trained in administering the test.

Some commentators thought that the legality of the FCP in the United States would be challenged. Most suits would be of the civil rights variety—Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, could object to the drawing of their blood.

Canute kissed Ellen and drove to his office. She still had not reproached him for his having insisted on putting off having children until he was thirty and she was twenty-six. She was more restrained than he had thought she could be. Perhaps she was waiting until the results of the FCP tests were known.

Jessica was waiting at the office with a list of what she had accomplished the day before. Rawley would be in at 10:30, ready to discuss the legal actions needed for conversion. The board of directors and a few major stockholders would be at the Golden Boar's Head for lunch at 12:00. The meeting would start at 1:00. Mr. Joshua Tabbs of the First United Federal Savings and Trust was ready to meet him at 10:00 the next morning if Canute had the

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go-ahead on the conversion from the board.

"How did he sound?" Jackson asked.

"Upset."

"I was hoping he'd sound friendly—as he does when he's favorable to a loan. But that's too much to expect. Everybody's upset. They're either too jittery or too controlled."

Jessica looked up from her note pad. Her eyes were naturally large and makeup made them enormous. They were a lovely violet under the contact lenses she always wore in his presence. He suspected that their real color was blue. No doubt a lovely blue.

"Mr. Canute, what do you think about this FCP? Do you think everybody will have to take the test?"

"I see no other way out," he said. "The world—humanity, rather—can't afford to let a single fertile person go—unused."

"But what about unmarried persons?"

"Jessica, the normal social sanctions don't apply. When survival is threatened conventions go out the window."

She glanced down at her full breasts, then looked up at him.

"But what if, say, someone like me were—uh—fertile and the man I loved wasn't?"

"No trouble," Jackson said, looking at his wristwatch. "Artificial insemination is available."

"But what if my husband didn't want to bring up another man's child?"

"You've got no idea how much social pressure is going to be brought to bear on people like that," Canute said. "Listen, Jessica, today's a very important one for Canute Baby Foods, Incorporated. Screen my calls even more thoroughly than usual. Use your judgment."

"How soon do you think the FCP will get going?"

"What? Oh, I don't know. Several months maybe. If Congress makes it a law. I'll be in my office. Send Rawley in as soon as he shows."

THE morning went smoothly. Rawley, red-faced, red-eyed, moved sluggishly, but his brain was functioning. Once he understood that Jackson did not want to talk about Clabb or the FCP, he stuck to business. But when he was leaving he said, "What the hell will my wife and I do if none of our six kids are fertile?"

"The oldest are seventeen and sixteen, right?" Jackson said. "They're old enough to take the test now, so you will soon know the score. The others are twelve, eleven,

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nine, and seven, right? So you have to wait until they pass puberty and then find out. Meanwhile I suggest you think about their reactions, not yours."

"I am, I am," Rawley said. "Their reactions, as you call them, are mine. When they cry I cry."

"And when you—"

Jackson stopped.

To suggest that Rawley quit dissolving his backbone in booze and give his children a good example would only anger him.

"What?" Rawley said.

"Nothing. Good luck to your kids. Good luck to all kids."

The probabilities were against it, but one of Rawley's children might be fertile, one of Busiris' lucky ten. If they were lucky. Being fertile was going to bring on them an enormous amount of public scrutiny and concern. And disappointed psychotics would be a danger to them. The lucky might have to become semiprisoners, guarded by the state for their own good.

The luncheon and board meeting were attended by several wealthy older women who owned large blocks of stock. They were not concerned about their own sterility or fertility—they were past the age even to be tested under the FCP. But they had children who were worried. Jackson answered all questions calmly and with an optimism he did not believe was founded in reality. But his object was to get them in a frame of mind for a rational consideration of the financial difficulties that Canute Baby Foods, Inc., faced. A few could not grasp the idea that baby foods would be out of customers in two years or less.

"But that means that my son's infant disposables will be gone, too," Mrs. Wilmort said.

"Many businesses will become obsolete," Canute said. "It's easy to think of the obvious ones. But many more will be affected as time goes on. One trend will be constant and we would all do well to keep it in mind. From now on all businesses will have an ever-decreasing number of customers. The expanding economy, along with the expansion of population, is a thing of the past."

"The stock market is still declining," Mrs. Dammfrum said.

"It'll stabilize and start up again," Jackson said, not really believing it would. The mental depression of the world always generated a financial depression.

"That goddamned Clabb!" Mrs. Mondries said. Jackson smiled. She was a self-righteous, stickily prudish person. He would have thought nothing could bring such an outburst from her. Which

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showed how much he knew.

The meeting following the luncheon was perfunctory and lasted only minutes. Jackson got his clearance to convert and buzzed Jessica to move his meeting with Tabb ahead to that afternoon. No one had much heart for business.

Reverend Cottons, a prominent stockholder and a nondenominational preacher, gave the parting blessing. He prayed that God would have pity on His children and cancel Clabb's evil deeds, stick His finger in, as it were, and resurrect the dead wrigglers and eggs. The reverend was a tall handsome man of fifty-six who could project considerable charisma or a reasonable facsimile thereof. Along with this went a virility that both males and females of his church seemed to relish. Horniness and divinity, Canute thought, had always been allied deep in the layman's mind—somewhere in the nether layers of human awareness the desire to worship the goddess of fertility lurked eternally.

Even Canute, who belonged to no faith, felt more optimistic after Cottons had finished his prayer. It was all but impossible to believe in sterility in the reverend's juicy presence.

AT three in the afternoon Canute was in Tabbs' office. The banker was a lean, bald-headed man with small eyes, the greenish color of which suggested new dollar bills. He was all smiles and little jokes, but he was also unwilling to make a decision.

"I can't take an objective look at what your conversion involves until this panic is over," Tabbs said. "You understand, don't you?"

"Of course," Canute said. "But I don't have much time to start moving."

"I realize that. But you haven't stated exactly what you intend to convert to. And the canned food business is highly competitive, isn't that so?"

"It is. I can give you the figures for the whole canning industry next time we meet. At this time, as I said over the phone, I just want to get an idea of your interest in making me a loan."

"Before you go to somebody else? Believe me, Jackson, our relationship has been such that I have great—the greatest—confidence, in you. You're only twenty-eight but your success in running your father's business has been remarkable. Under almost any other circumstances I wouldn't hesitate to say that we would advance whatever you required. But under other circumstances you wouldn't be wanting to convert, would you?

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The bank, too, has to face changed conditions."

Bankers dealt in hard facts and figures, but they were the most plastic of people. Or the most ectoplasmic.

"I can understand why you want to wait," Canute said. "Only I can't afford to wait."

"I appreciate that," Tabbs said. "Look, it'll take you some time to decide exactly what you want to do, how much the operation will cost, what losses you'll suffer during the shutdown and changeover and so forth. By the time you've got your facts in hand we may be in a better position to understand what's going on. In other words, the dust will have settled and we can see how near the mountains are."

Canute rose at the same time as Tabbs. Tabbs looked a little annoyed that Canute had anticipated him.

They shook hands and Tabbs said, "I am very sorry. But—"

"The bank comes first, of course," Canute said and wondered why Tabbs felt it necessary to apologize.

"My daughter became pregnant about four months ago," Tabbs said. "So she escaped this tragic thing. You might say our family made a deposit just in time. What interest she'll bear—"

Canute smiled but did not laugh because he was not sure that Tabbs wasn't being serious.

"Congratulations," he said. "You'll be a grandparent at least once. And perhaps your daughter may be one of the lucky ones."

"Better than having gold in the bank," Tabbs said. He ushered Canute out as if he were concentrating on the treasure in the dark vault of his daughter's womb.

OUT on the street Canute felt deflated. He had known the market was bad, but he had not, somehow, expected to be turned down. But he wasn't angry at Tabbs. Tabbs had to face a different future along with everyone else.

The First United Federal was at the end of the short leg of a large suburban shopping center in the form of an *L*. Canute decided to take a stroll around it. He could observe the state of business and also do some thinking about the conversion. The sidewalks and stores seemed as crowded as ever and nothing in the faces or movements of the shoppers indicated that a catastrophe had occurred. Many still did not understand—emotionally anyway—the depths of the event. And the disaster was not one that had occurred quickly—like a tidal wave or a volcanic eruption—and would be soon over.

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This was an invisible calamity. Its effects would assume reality slowly—so slowly that most people would not begin to see the overall results plainly for five years. Even then the visible effects would not be overwhelming or too frightening. With 60,000,000 people dying each year, five years would see 300,000,000 dead all over the world. The deceased would leave a sizable gap behind them. Put together, they would fill a monstrously large and terrifying cemetery. But they would not be collected—they would be scattered everywhere. The Earth would absorb them quietly and, at the local level, the survivors would not notice much difference. Cities and towns would not be quite as crowded. Empty apartments and houses would be more numerous but not depressingly so. Births had recently averaged more than 125,000,000 yearly. Subtract the annual deaths of 60,000,000, and the world had yearly gained 65,000,000 persons. In effect, Earth had annually taken on the additional burden of a new nation—another France or Germany, say. That gain had been suddenly cut off. Some years would have to pass before the full scope of the loss became visible to citizens other than statisticians.

Canute walked down the short leg and the long leader of the *L* to the liquor store. It was crowded—the clerks were moving jerkily, trying to serve all customers at once. All the liquor stores, according to a comment by a TV newsman, were breaking sales records. Some of the customers looked as if they had drunk up everything at home and had been forced to go out for more, whether or not they could now see or walk straight.

HE WALKED back to the parking lot. The date was April 15. The sky was blue and cloudless. It had rained three days before—the grass was green and the trees were budding. It was a fine day to be alive. Yet, as T.S. Eliot had written, "April is the cruelest month." Mankind was facing its end. Or was it? Clabb's letter had made it plain that he thought he was giving humanity its only chance to survive. Perhaps he was right. Even so, this was still the cruelest month of Canute's life.

He drove back to his office. Kalender, the business agent of the canning workers' union, was waiting for him.

Canute shook his hand and said, "I was wondering how long it would take you to realize the implications."

Kalender did not ask, *Implica-*

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tions of what? He said, "You're giving me credit for more intelligence than I have. I should have seen it, but I didn't. Shock, I suppose. I hope it was shock, not stupidity. But I saw Millman's show last night and he said that in five years kindergartens the world over would be empty. And in six, all first grades. I sat up and yelled at Richie—she's my wife, you met her at—"

"I know," Canute said. "A lovely woman. Well, come on in. I would have called you by tomorrow anyway."

Kalender's suit came from the same tailor as Canute's—his tie, however, was a trifle more flamboyant. He had long ago gotten over his original, somewhat belligerent manner toward Canute. He listened without interruption while Canute told him what he had done so far and what he hoped to do.

"We still have to walk out on July first if the industry doesn't give in." Kalender said.

"You really think they'll vote for a strike with the economy in such questionable shape and with the future so debatable?"

"You forget they passed up a pay increase last year because of Lister's anti-inflation speech. I was surprised when they voted against a strike. But this year they're hurting even more. Prices—well, you know. The thing is, even if they don't want to strike on account of they'd like to help you make the conversion, they have to. This is national, and the canning workers not in baby foods won't be affected by your special situation. We'll have to go along with national headquarters."

"Maybe you could get a dispensation from them," Canute said.

Kalender smiled slightly. "I don't think I'll get anywhere, though I'll try. The central office always takes the view that the minority must suffer if the majority will profit. And—"

Canute said, "In ten years Busiris' two hundred thousand population will be down to about a hundred and eighty-two thousand. Sales of canned foods—of everything, in fact—will be dropping. Now, Busiris' decrease in population doesn't sound like much. And Canute Foods, after conversion, will do the bulk of its business outside Busiris. But the overall decline in the number of consumers will inevitably force the closing of much of the canning industry in fifteen years. The effects will be felt long before then. Here and there factories will close down —never to reopen."

Kalender leaned forward and said, "You trying to scare me?"

"Think about it and you'll scare yourself."

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CANUTE drummed his fingers on his desktop and then said, "According to our present contract, the company has to pay a full weekly wage to each worker laid off during any shutdown for maintenance, repair, conversion, etc. But not during a strike. So—"

"I thought you'd bring that up." Kalender paused to light a cigar. "If you wait until the strike to start converting, you won't have to pay your workers during the shutdown. The national office is aware of this —I talked to the headquarters for an hour last night about it. Phoned them a half-hour after I realized what was going to happen. They said—all this is confidential, off the record, you know—that the new contract will take care of that. The company will have to reimburse its workers a hundred percent of the pay lost during a shutdown, strike or no strike. The reimbursement can be stretched out over six months, doesn't have to be paid at once. We know that the industry has its problems and we'll go along —to a certain extent."

Jackson Canute leaned back, put his hands behind his head and looked up at the pale blue ceiling with its glowing traceries: mandalas, crux ansatas, cosmic eyes, dollar signs, pyramids, infinity signs, ying and yang.

"I object in principle. But in practice I can't see that it makes much difference. If you don't strike we have to pay you during shutdown. However, I don't know what view the banks will take of the strike and the shutdown pay. They might decide that they can't make the loan. Banks take the long-range view, you know, and they won't have any trouble extrapolating the effects of decpop, as the newsmen are calling it. The canned food industry is highly competitive. You know that as well as I. And our establishing a foothold is going to take time, will cost us much and possibly—I might even say most likely—will result in failure.

"And even if we—notice the *we*, since you workers are as much a part of Canute Canned Foods as the managers and stockholders—even if we do get a good share of the business, enough to keep us going, we won't be able to keep up the gross indefinitely. Sales, as I said, will inevitably decline for the entire industry. And then the dog-eat-dog struggle ends in one dog, top dog. And within forty years—with two billion four hundred million of those now living dead and with very little replacement—the world population will be about one billion six hundred million. Still sounds like a lot, doesn't it? Well, it's eight million less than it was in nineteen hundred.

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"Seventy years from now there will still be several million centenarians, nonagenarians and so on. And several hundred thousand young fertile people. Maybe. If society doesn't crumble long before then, which it may well do. As you know, modern society, capitalist, communist, or socialist, depends on an expanding economy. Which—"

"I know," Kalender said. "And the banks know. But even so, if the banks quit making loans because of this they will go out of business. Won't they hang on to a business-as-usual policy as long as possible?"

"I hope so."

Canute talked some more about what could be done. But in the end the two returned from the abstract and the unlikely to the coming next six months. Finally Kalender decided to leave.

"Usually these preliminary talks straighten both of us out on the realities and the potentials," he said. "No matter what our public statements, we both knew pretty well what we will end up doing. But this time—who knows? It's up to the banks—"

"They're just part of the total picture," Canute said. "They're depending on many things to help them make up their minds. One of which, a very important which, is the President of the United States. Maybe he'll say something significant in tonight's speech."

Kalender left. Canute felt depressed. Even reminding himself that depression was anger turned inward did not help. What was he angry at? The union? Because of its short-sightedness? Its members were acting according to the old rules—and if they didn't see that new rules had to be adopted they were no more blind than the managers and the bankers. Perhaps the President, who was a flexible and unconventional man—too much so for many voters—would come up with new rules. But even if he did—could he get his nation to accept them?

CANUTE had invited to dinner the Rawleys; his vice president, Markham and wife; Mrs. Luckenvor (who came after visiting her husband in the hospital); Jack Ward, a construction company owner and a powerful politician; the city manager and his wife and Manfred Schiller, a black economics professor at Traybell University.

The dinner went only so-so—talk was punctuated by frequent total silences despite the tested ability of everyone present to keep a conversation going. Afterward the party

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moved into the big TV room to view Lister's speech.

The President was a lean-faced man of fifty-three. His voice had a compelling resonance—it made most voters want to believe him. Normally he managed to look both grave and cheerful at the same time, but tonight a bleakness seemed to override his spirit. Or perhaps, Canute thought, his viewers had turned off their cheerfulness receptors.

Canute was disappointed that the President did not propose some bold new economic measures. However, he had no right to expect them. As he had told himself earlier, it was too early for these. The major part of the speech concerned the setting up of fertility tests for the entire nation, exclusive of the too old and the too young, of course. The first tests would be given on June 28 and the FCP Department, newly created, would handle the project. Professional medical personnel was not needed to make the tests or even interpret their results. Within four months the nation should know what its "fertility resources" were. Scientists' projections placed these at approximately 13,250 persons. The aged were excluded. Youngsters whose natural resistance to the aerosol could be determined but whose actual fertility would not be known until they matured sexually were included in the statistical projection.

Lister emphasized several times that the fertiles would be given special treatment from now on. He did not say what the special treatment was to be.

The President said that the world had no reason to panic. The overpopulation problem had been solved overnight, as it were, whether or not the world liked the nature of the solution. What had happened was a catastrophe, but it was not the end of man. Far from it. People were not dying any faster or in any greater numbers. The only difference that had immediate impact was that the world was not having to handle daily the arrival of enough babies to populate New Orleans, Louisiana, or Newark, New Jersey.

Lister took a hopeful view of the situation.

However—and here Lister's voice trumpeted as if for a cavalry charge—the old methods of dealing with society, economics and so forth could no longer be used. This was a new and unprecedented situation. Fresh approaches would have to be developed. There would be much resistance to some of these, since most people were naturally conservative, naturally resistant to swift change. But everyone

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would soon see that the old methods were now useless.

The new departures would be described in a future speech. Meanwhile no cause for panic or even pessimism existed on either individual or national levels . . .

The party at Canute's listened quietly to the various commentators on the President's speech. Next came extracts of other speeches made by heads of other states from all over the world. In essence these made the same points Lister had made.

Canute finally turned off the set. Everybody began to talk excitedly at once. Even those who were suspicious of Lister's "methods" were not gloomy. They seemed to take a joy in arguing that there was no sense in abandoning the present system for even more socialism or for communist-type institutions. It was evident that the President's speech had uplifted everybody, even those who would fight against his measures to deal with the crisis.

"What do you think about it, Jackson?" Rawley said.

"Whatever the new system is, some men will come out on top and some will go down," Canute said.

"And you hope to be on top, right?" Rawley asked.

"I believe that I'm flexible enough," Canute said.

"Well, I hope you're flexible enough to get a loan for the conversion. Say, maybe that's one of the things Lister was hinting at? A Federal loan could keep Canute Baby Foods, Incorporated, in business."

The trouble with Rawley, Canute thought, was that he insisted on thinking in the same old grooves.

June, Year One

JACKSON and Ellen Canute had received a letter from the newly created Fertility Checkup Project Department two weeks earlier. They were to report at the Reywoods High School for their tests on the morning of June 28th. Instructions included a procedure to follow if the Canutes objected to taking the test on religious or civil-rights grounds. Arrest was automatic, but under the Emergency Vital Resources Law the arrestee would be released immediately on bail. The law required that the case be tried within a week before a special judge and a jury of twelve peers. This was unheard-of speed for the courts, but the fertility resisters, as the news media dubbed them, had total priority. The Government, which was the people, could not afford to miss one potential parent. The President, during a press interview, had stated that mankind's existence

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depended upon one in every 20,000 persons—and that one must be found. He pointed out that similar laws with much harsher methods of enforcement and penalties were being passed in less democratic nations.

A new law had been passed by the time June 28th came around. It required resisters to be subjected to physical and psychiatric testing. The theory was that anyone who would not cooperate in saving mankind had to be psychotic. Part of the test was drawing a needle across the skin so that blood welled. Most of those scratched failed to react with inflammation and these were quickly released without a trial. A number of suits were filed against the U.S. government before testing even began and eventually the U.S. Supreme Court declared the law unconstitutional. But by then everybody, objector or not, had been tested.

Jackson and Ellen drove to the high school on the hot July morning. A traffic jam delayed them for ten minutes. Then they had to cruise around the big parking lot until someone pulled out. A little steam-driven Volkswagen tried to beat them into the parking place. It was going in the wrong direction, ignoring the signs and arrows all over the place.

Ellen had been sullen and withdrawn that morning and Jackson was angry about this. That was why, when he saw the Volkswagen cut around the car that had just left the parking place and swing sharply inward, he kicked down on the accelerator. He and Ellen were jerked back. Canute swung the wheel. Ellen gasped and put one hand on the dashboard and the other on his right arm. He blew the horn, but the driver of the little car, grinning at him from under a thick mustache, made no effort to slow down. Jackson swore as the Volkswagen crashed into his left fender.

He and Ellen sat still for a moment, shaking and pale. The impact bag before them was shrinking with a long drawn-out gasp.

"You all right?" Jackson asked.

Ellen said, "I think so. I'm just scared, that's all."

"I was doing eight and he was going about thirteen," Jackson told her. "That's a twenty-one-kilometer impact."

"I'm glad you're so cool and quick-thinking," Ellen said. "You're so cool that now I'll never have a baby!"

"We haven't had the test yet, remember?" He unfastened his safety belts and opened the door. He knew that if he stayed in the car he would really take off on Ellen.

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He climbed out and examined the damage to his car. The fender had crumpled, but the little car's bumper, hood and radiator were pushed in. About a thousand dollars' worth of damage for the other man—a hundred for himself.

A guard appeared, a recorder hung around his neck and a microphone in his hand. The driver of the Volkswagen got out, but his woman passenger stayed inside. She was a pretty girl of about twenty and held a baby. It was screaming loudly. But the mother was safety-belted and both she and the baby had been protected by the impact bag. The driver, also young, wore one of the new Marie Antoinette wigs, green wrap-around glasses, dangly crystal earrings and fluorescent pink-and-green striped Louis XVI suit. He was pale and angry.

"I got a baby in the car," he said.

CANUTE was taken aback. But he quickly recovered. He asked, "So why were you driving the wrong way, speeding and endangering the infant by trying to beat me into the parking place, to which you had no right?"

The officer stopped in front of them, flicked on the recorder and said, "I called the regulars. Meanwhile, your ID card, please."

Jackson handed it to him and the officer stuck the card into the recorder. A tiny light gleamed and he removed the card, handed it back to Jackson. He then asked the young man for his card.

The young man gave it to him, but said, "I've got a baby in the car and this guy paid no attention to him—"

A crowd had gathered. A number of them must have seen the accident, but only one, a middle-aged lady named Greenbaum, volunteered to be a witness.

The young man, a Mr. Dutton, continued to harp on the fact that his infant son had been a passenger. And that Canute had ignored the baby and crashed right on through.

Jackson did not understand Dutton's insistence on this completely irrelevant point. What did the baby have to do with this, except that its presence should have made Dutton more careful with his driving? Then he heard comments, some subdued, some loud, from the bystanders and understood what Dutton was getting at. The young man was entirely in the wrong, but he knew that things had changed—that babies were now the most precious of all mankind's possessions. And he was appealing to the crowd on the basis of this. He was succeding. More and more hostile looks and

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remarks were directed at Canute.

Canute felt like hitting Dutton. But he also felt helpless. Emotion was winning over logic in this situation. It would not win in a court battle, of course. Or would it? Jurors were human.

The city police arrived and took down their evidence. A service truck towed away Dutton's car. Canute drove his into the parking space and helped Ellen out.

Ten minutes after the needles had been drawn across their wrists neither of their scratches had yielded inflammation.

Ellen waited five minutes past the reaction time—since people did vary—then began weeping quietly.

Jackson guided her out by the elbow. As he passed the Duttons, he heard the wife say, "I can't help it that I'm all right and you're not, can I? Is it my fault? And what good is it anyway? We're married, aren't we? And we have a baby already, don't we?"

Despite Ellen's grief Jackson could not help smiling. Later he would feel a little ashamed because of his momentary exultation and still later he would be sorry for Mrs. Dutton. He found, some years afterward, that her baby had died and that she had divorced Dutton and married a fertile man.

Such news made the papers.

At the moment he had little time to think about the Duttons. Ellen sobbed violently in the car. He tried to put his arm around her and draw her to him, but was shoved away. He gave up and drove home and when she locked herself in her room he went out, got into the car and drove to Mike's.

August, Year One

JACKSON CANUTE had studied the reports of his business analysts. They confirmed in specifics what he had been sure of in general. The canning industry was overcrowded and would face a steadily declining market from now on. Even if Canute's company could get a loan, bank or Federal, conversion would simply postpone bankruptcy to the near future.

Another complication was that the distributors for the canners had raised their demands. They wanted an official increase of a cent a can for their services and an under-the-table increase of a cent a can. The organization that controlled the distributors—Canute did not doubt they were owned by a crime syndicate—was trying to grab all the profit it could before the market went to hell.

Six banks, starting with First United Federal, had turned down Canute. Canute had then called

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in Kalender and told him that it would make no difference if the union struck or not. Kalender, even though he had expected this, turned pale.

"What about a Federal loan?" Kalender asked.

"If we could get it—and I doubt we could—by the time we cleared the red tape we would be too late," Jackson said. "It looks as if we'll all be on welfare. And when I say all I include myself."

"That isn't something to joke about." Kalender looked grim. "You've got money in the bank, powerful friends—and you're a graduate biochemist with a degree on the side in business administration."

"It's none of your business, but I have enough in the bank to pay for three months' living and maintenance on my Highview Drive mansion. And my powerful friends can't get me a job if none is available."

Kalender's surprise was thinly filmed over with pleasure. Something in him rejoiced in an employer's ill fortune and could not be entirely hidden. Canute did not resent this. Kalender's reaction was a human one.

"It takes time to dispose of the company," Canute said. "I can't just lock up and walk away. It'll be six months or more before all the paperwork and legal procedures are gone through. I hate to think of the board of directors' meetings, the stockholders' meetings, the meetings with lawyers and Uncle Sam's representatives and so on—to nausea."

Kalender stood up. "You think it's going to be easy to tell my men they're out on the streets?" He shook hands with Canute. "Good luck."

"Good luck to you, too," Canute said. "But we'll be seeing each other quite often for several months, anyway. It's funny—isn't it? We'll see each other more while we're getting rid of the business than when we were prosperous."

August, Year One

BUSIRIS, Illinois, had at this time exactly 200,302 inhabitants. Of these twelve were naturally resistant to the aerosol and presumably fertile. Four were married to sterile partners. Four were under sixteen years of age. One was a Roman Catholic nun who had objected to being tested but had finally given in. One was a lesbian living with another lesbian. One was a hopelessly insane twenty-seven-year-old woman. The twelfth was a forty-five-year-old man, divorced, childless, diabetic, a

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misogynist and a firm believer in the theory that God intended that mankind should perish. Hence, under no circumstances, would he provide his seed for the survival of humanity.

Other cities all over the world revealed similar patterns.

The rural village of Boseman, a few miles west of Busiris, had a population of 500 with not one naturally resistant person.

The metropolitan area of New York City had approximately 13,000,000 population of whom 650 were resistant.

Of Earth's approximately four billion population, 200,000 were resistant. The figures were not quite accurate, since there were some pygmy, Negrito, and Amazon Indian tribes that had escaped the test. Of the 200,000 about half were women. Of these 100,000, about 25,000 did not seem available for reproduction for one reason or another, including sterility. That a person was resistant to Clabb's aerosol did not mean that he or she was fertile. And, if the fertile women married to unfertile men were included among the unavailable women their total rose to 85,000.

"What we must do," the Chinese premier said in his famous Peking Statement, "is make the unavailable available."

"We will persuade but never coerce," the prime minister of England said.

"Mother Russia demands the utmost in sacrifice from her children," the Soviet premier said.

The Pope, at the time the first complete statistics were compiled, had still not made any public statement regarding the attitude of the Church toward the new situation. But he was reported to be working on it.

"Now is the time for every citizen to act for the general good first and for himself next," the President of the United States said. "Laws must be enacted to permit the citizen to do this."

Lister, interviewed the next day, said that he would make specific proposals at a later, more appropriate time. By this, according to some news analysts, Lister meant when the public temper had been readied to receive radical proposals favorably. The analysts were vague about what they meant by radical.

The drunks standing at the bar in Mike's were vague, too, in their remarks about the speech and the professional comments on it. But they were precise enough in their adjectives directed at the President and the analysts.

"Listen, Jackson," Rawley said, pushing a dense front of bourbon against Jackson's face. "I think

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Lister, the weirdo's friend, is working up to something really radical. Like real radical, you get me? He hinted, just hinted, mind you, in his speech last month —you remember, you were at my place for dinner—that our present system isn't up to handling this crisis. He didn't say what he meant by 'system.' But he isn't putting anything over on me. I know his record. I know whom he used to hobnob with and whom he'd really like to have in his cabinet. I know all about his speeches on the economy of abundance when he was a young Congressman. So—"

Jackson listened for a while. When Rawley ordered another drink Jackson said, "If the house is so termite-ridden it's too late for the exterminator, ready to fall down, then you tear it down and build a new one. You don't just shore it up."

"What?" Rawley asked.

"The economy's going to hell, has been for a long time. It's been unable to handle its problems at even a sixty percent efficiency for years. You know that—you just won't admit it. And now that this has come along we can't just fight it with the old tired-and-untrue methods, you follow me, Rawley?"

The lawyer was slipping away, his head drooping and his nose almost in his drink. Jackson stopped talking and began the task of getting him to his car so he could drive him home. Rawley's wife could take a taxi and pick up Rawley's car later.

September, Year One

THE president made his famous Blessing in Disguise speech the day before Labor Day. The entire speech lasted sixty minutes and was undoubtedly the most "compressed" that any president had ever made.

Jackson, working late that night, viewed it in his office. He sat at his desk with a glass of bourbon and ice and sipped while Lister made history.

Lister began by saying that the deed—Clabb's—was done and could not be canceled. Now was the time for the people of America—and of the world—to shed their grief and depression. If they were to survive as a viable society and bequeath their few children a viable society—and ensure that civilization endured—they must perform not miracles but prodigies. What they had to do would be difficult, but not impossible. They must shed old habits of thought and action. They must become new men.

And Clabb had opened the way

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for them, whether or not he had intended doing so. The pollution problem was taking care of itself and would continue to fade away as the population became smaller and smaller. And although unemployment had increased enormously, this was only a temporary situation. Lister anticipated a labor shortage in the near future if his plans were put into effect. The nation would prosper as never before from the grassroots upward. Poverty would disappear. Anybody who wanted an education would be able to get it free. Earth would be beautified and the generation born after the Clabb Effect had run its course—the fertile generation—would be taken care of. It would not inherit a world that had fallen into howling savagery, as so many continued to predict. It would inherit a world that was as close to paradise as fallible human nature could create.

What the President and his advisors envisioned was a society progressively cybernated. Every industry or service that could be equipped with electronic brains and mechanical organs and limbs would be so equipped. Success would ensure that the means of production—from mines to factories to transportation to the final dispensing of goods to the consumers—would be as efficient as possible.

This automation would not deprive people of their jobs. On the contrary, more jobs than there were people to fill them would be available. The total efforts of the entire population were needed to build the cybernated society and, as people passed away—Canute lifted his glass in a silent toast to the soon-to-be-dead, among whom would be himself, maybe—the computers and the machines would take over. Cybernated farms, for example, would continue to produce unfalteringly, regardless of population changes or shifts. Citizens would actually be liberated—worthwhile work would replace toiling for survival.

"And how the hell are you going to cybernate the farms without turning the privately owned ones into state-owned combines—and what will happen to the farmers who are dispossessed?" Canute asked his TV set out loud. "Tomorrow you'll be accused of being a Communist—and the day after you'll be shot by some madman."

Lister, it became obvious, had asked himself the same questions. He took some pains to make sure his audience understood him. Private farmers, he promised, would be given cybernated equipment and trained in its use. Those who wanted to learn how to repair and maintain the equipment would go

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to free schools. Those who would not or could not master the necessary skills could call on a pool of technicians.

What Lister did not say at that time or later—events simply worked out that way—was that if a farmer died and left no heirs the Government would buy his place and turn it into a state farm. And if the deceased had heirs the treasury department would permit adjustments in the inheritance tax if the heirs would sell the property to the Government.

Lister also did not mention that the repeal of the Twenty-second Amendment to the Constitution was already quietly on the way and that it would become effective in time for him to be elected to a third term. And a fourth, fifth and sixth.

Despite the many strong objections to Lister's programs later on most of the nation was thrilled and cheered by his speech that night. Out of bad would come good—at least prosperity for everybody. He was truly the leader of his people—courageous, adaptable. At last, after a series of—from the historical viewpoint—inept Presidents, a great man had risen.

JACKSON CANUTE received a telephone call two weeks to the day after Lister's speech.

"The White House, Mr. Canute," Jessica said in a quivering voice.

The President? Canute's heart banged like a loose valve.

His caller was not Lister but one of the President's large staff of undersecretaries. He asked how Canute was, said that he was glad in response to Canute's: "Fine—" and promised that Canute would receive a letter from the President himself, or at least one originally composed and signed by him. It would confirm this call and spell out in more personal detail the President's plans. This was merely an overall briefing on what Canute might expect.

Canute knew, in outline, the purpose and the setup of CONES, The Committee of National Economic Standards. The news media had talked and printed enough about it. Now he was being asked if he would serve on the local board—if, in fact, he would help organize it under the supervision of the local chairman. The chairman had recommended Canute because he knew that Canute would not be occupied with his business and because Canute had the necessary qualifications. One of these was that he was a prominent member of the President's political party and a good friend of the

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chairman. But there was more to it than that, of course.

Canute said that he would give a verbal acceptance now and a written one later. He thanked the secretary and watched the fading image with great satisfaction.

Jessica was too disciplined to ask him what the call had been about. Canute, not being consciously sadistic, summoned her and gave her the news. Jessica looked even more beautiful when she was thrilled—and she was certainly at her most beautiful now. The contrast between her and Ellen, who had been looking and acting more and more haggish lately, was strong and troubling. Jessica never bothered Jackson and obviously adored him. Her reaction to the sterility problem continued markedly different from Ellen's. If she suffered grief she had not allowed it to show or sour her outlook. She had been married once, briefly, and though she had never said much about it, she had mentioned a year ago—she and Jackson had been working late—that any man she loved would have to compete with her dead father. Jackson had decided then and there that their relationship would always be that of employer and employee. He would never compete with a ghost, he had told himself. More than once.

Jessica was so thrilled now that she kissed him quickly on the lips and then, laughing, ran back to the outer office. Jackson had not kissed a woman for ten days—Ellen had begun to turn her cheek to him and for the past four days he had quit trying for even that.

Well, marriage meant more than kisses and every mentally stable woman got over her depressions. If Ellen were to become happy again Canute would be happy. He did not know what more he could do to bring her out of her pit. He had tried everything he could within the little time phasing out Canute Baby Foods, Inc., allowed him these days. He had tried to get her to go to a psychiatrist or go with him to a marriage counselor. But she had refused. These men could not make her fertile, she had said. She had emphasized *men*, making it plain that he was a member of that guilty set. Probably, more accurately, he was in an inner circle consisting only of himself—the man who had put off having children.

He had asked her if she would like to adopt a child. She had said no—she wanted one of her own. He had thought she might change her mind and had investigated possibilities. They were none existent—he was far too late. The day after the release of Clabb's

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letter the orphanages had been avalanched with requests for adoption.

Ellen was also suffering from the shock of being no longer married to an affluent man. She had objected vigorously—had even thrown ash trays at him—when he had told her that the house must be put up for sale, though there was little chance it could be sold without a great loss. The real-estate market had caved in.

Now, however, the CONES position would pay him $100,000 a year. Inflation made that equal to about $45,000 of ten years ago. He wouldn't suffer and he could keep the house, but he certainly was not going to be affluent again. He and Ellen would have to watch the budget very closely. And it might be best to sell at a loss that could be partially deducted from his income tax if he purchased a smaller home in the same year.

He poured bourbon into two glasses of ice and called Jessica back for a toast. She would not be out of a job after all, he told her. As a CONES board member he would need a battery of secretaries—whom she could boss. He would have enough budget to pay for them. Not to mention—as he did not—that he was going to have considerable influence and power as a CONES official.

So here's to our future, Jessica!

April, Year Three

WITH an annual death rate of nine per 1,000 inhabitants Busiris should have lost 5,400 citizens in three years. But the suicide, homicide and fatal accident rates had risen sharply. The population, instead of 194,600, was now approximately 183,800. However, the suicides and homicides seemed to be leveling to pre-Clabb times.

The lack of births and the attrition by death were so far almost unnoticeable. When Canute drove to work or downtown—or sometimes just around the town—he saw few empty houses. The only sights that really hit him were the day nurseries.

The nurseries were completely shut down. He saw children playing on the school grounds during recess, but he knew that the kindergartens and low grades would soon be empty. For years the schools had been steadily getting more overcrowded. But before long classes would be cut down in size and more teachers per pupil would be available.

Canute, as a CONES board member—chairman now, in fact—was also educational supervisor. He toured the schools from time to time, though most of the overseeing

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was done by a secretary. In three years his budget had tripled and he now had twice as many people working for him as at the beginning. He had much power, but his responsibilities and work had also increased. He had been feted a number of times, approached by many who wanted favors, and had been beaten badly by four men who had called him a "tool of the Government," among other things. He was lucky. One CONES member had been shot in the brain late at night as he got into his car in the parking lot. The killers had pinned a button to his bloody coat—above the letters FFF was a hand holding a lighted torch. Fighters For Freedom. The underground revolutionaries. Unlike the underground of the past, this group was composed of "reactionaries," men who wanted the old system kept intact, who still insisted that the old structures were suited for solving the new problems.

As it had turned out, a jealous husband had hired three men to murder the CONES official and had succeeded for a time in putting the blame on the underground. The jealous husband had happened to be the man responsible for Canute's appointment to the board, its first chairman. The resultant scandal had been used by opponents of the Government in an effort to discredit its policies.

Canute had been appointed the new chairman and had accepted the position in the midst of heavy criticism. One of his bitterest critics—and the most influential—was the editor-publisher of the *Busiris Journal-Sun*. Caleb Tooney was sixty years old, a lifelong conservative and a big stockholder in the huge Earthmover Diesel Works of Busiris. He was also a vigorous enemy of Lister and his policies. Many of his editorials prophesied that Lister would have to suspend certain portions of the Constitution, such as civil rights, if he were to carry out his plans efficiently. That Tooney could print his editorials seemed to be the best refutation of his prophesies.

July, Year Five

WHEN the *Busiris Journal-Sun* building burned down the police chief blamed arsonists. He produced evidence that the fire had been set, but found nothing to help him make an arrest. Some psychotic might have set it simply because he liked to watch the flames. Tooney claimed privately that the Government intelligence people had set the fire, though he did not directly accuse Lister.

Canute wondered.

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He told himself that the fate of humanity was at stake. Strong Government measures had to be taken, measures that he himself would have condemned as criminal in ordinary circumstances, but might consider justified in the light of current emergencies.

He next told himself that he was indulging in cowardly rationalizations. What good if man survived if he had to build a repressive society to survive in? Actually Tooney's paper had acted as a safety valve for those who needed to blow off steam. It had been ineffective in hindering CONES. And it had called attention to the blunderings, the arrogances and the fracturing of people's rights, all of which the Government now and then was guilty of.

Whatever good or evil the paper had done, it was now through. Tooney was a stubborn old man. He tried to raise funds and get bank loans to rebuild his plant. He had been unable to collect his insurance because he had apparently failed to hire a sufficient number of security guards and set up the expensive alarm system the insurance people had specified. Tooney took the matter to court. The case was not tried until a year later and then it dragged on for six years in the lower and then the higher courts before Tooney lost. Meanwhile a more liberal syndicate announced plans to start a new paper, the *Busirian*. It never got off to a good start. The citizens of Busiris had to subscribe to out-of-town papers, usually a Chicago or St. Louis sheet, or catch the news on the local TV channel. In time one nationwide network dropped all programing except for news and eventually replaced the printed medium.

Canute checked around and saw a pattern suddenly taking shape around the country. Fires, bankruptcies, labor trouble, loss of advertising, sudden raises in taxes and outright vandalism were killing the remaining newspapers. In many cases nothing spectacular happened to a paper —except that a local TV station had become a full-time news agency and people quit subscribing. The Government was lending money to the TV news stations but not to the newspapers. It always had reasonable grounds for its refusals. The best was that it did not want to invest the taxpayers' dollars in a losing proposition.

October, Year Seven

DECPOP had reduced the citizens of Busiris to 176,625.

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The loss of 23,677 was somewhat noticeable but still not spooky. In fact, there were no empty houses in the better residential areas. When an owner died heirless—or his heirs were bought out—the Government gave loans to certain selected citizens of the poverty sections. These folks moved into the hitherto exclusive areas.

Jackson Canute lived in the most exclusive district. Six black families owned homes within two blocks of his. The blocks were, however, exceptionally long, the equivalent of three ordinary blocks. The heads of the black families were lawyers, doctors and college professors.

As Jackson passed through the neighboring district, which had homes in the $75,000-$50,000 class, he saw a score of black faces in hitherto honky homes. Their occupants, he knew, had once lived in the middle-class black area on the west side. Now they had moved up.

The people in poverty areas won their Government loans—and the chance to move—in restricted lotteries. But the winners Canute discovered without being able to prove his point, were carefully chosen. They were ambitious types who wanted to advance, who could be counted on to continue to conform to the Government's definition of "responsible citizens."

The Government was trying to siphon off the ghetto people with discretion. Others besides Jackson discovered the trend and there were riots and court actions. The riots were contained by law-enforcement officials and the court actions dragged endlessly. The protesters included both blacks and whites and each had reason to cry injustice.

As chairman of the CONES board, Canute had more actual power than the city manager of Busiris. He used it to organize a survey of the South Side poor whites. He discovered far fewer qualified candidates than the black ghetto produced—virtually no professional people and almost as few qualified on the basis of real ambition. Jackson recognized the social factors behind the phenomenon, but he could not help or alter those. He concluded that the Government was trying to make the necessary social transition as easy as possible and was, for once, conducting itself in a sensible manner. He did, however, discover enough whites to balance the blacks who had been moved into the neighborhood adjacent to his own. He began to move them whenever there was an opening. This resulted in accusations of discrimination by blacks—

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as well as by some whites—and his days and nights grew even more troubled.

Power was its own high pay, but its by-products were nerve-twisting ulcer-generating and also fatigue-causing. Even behind the buffer of his secretarial battery Jackson was beset with letters, phone calls, people catching him outside his office, waiting on the porch of his home. Once a note wrapped around a rock was thrown through his living-room window. The note held money to pay for the window, but Jackson had the man arrested anyway.

Ellen left him the next day. The rock-throwing was only one of a long series of incidents she had complained about. But she and Jackson had been quarreling more and more—their reconciliations were fewer and lasted a shorter time. Yet, if he had been able to spend more time with her, if she had not also been bothered by the petitioners, they might have been able to make peace.

Year Eight

JACKSON missed Ellen, but not very much. He married Jessica six months after his divorce. They were fairly happy, though she complained about his frequent absences. She continued to work for him, but he was gone much of the day from the office and much of the evening from home. She did have her bad times about being sterile and sometimes had nightmares about the end of the world. But these were infrequent and, in any event, she did not blame him for them.

Then Jessica thought she was pregnant. Pseudopregnancies had become a common phenomenon during the first ten years after Clabb. Often the pseudopregnancy was actually a large tumor, swiftly growing and all too frequently malignant and metastatic. It was as if a deep, unconscious desire in certain women to reproduce and so save humanity caused the growth of cells—certainly some such feeling kept many from early treatment. The growth was usually wild and resulted in the deaths of many women—so many that the annual death rate jumped from nine per thousand (in the first three years after Clabb) to eleven per thousand by the eighth year.

Jessica died at the end of the eighth year.

Perhaps this type of malignancy was, some psychologists speculated, one of the results of the end-of-the-world syndrome. Generally, the syndrome itself was a vague phenomenon, hence difficult to

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grapple with and conquer. It was like a question that could not be precisely phrased and so was unanswerable. Not many people went insane because of it. But it took the joy out of much of the work and the play. It bleached the skies, painted the Earth pale and it malformed men's unconscious minds.

Jackson Canute liked to think that he was exempt from this feeling. Up to Year Zero B.C. (Before Clabb, the news media facetiously had dubbed it), he had had work that had at least satisfied him. He had been a useful member of the community, administering an industry that supplied infants with nutrition. Now he was administering what was essentially a phasing-out operation. But it was the most gigantic and longest phasing out in history and he was playing an important part, even if only on a local scale. He loved more than anything to run an organization, to plan ahead on a large scale and to deal directly with people on the small scale.

Other people were not so happy, but that was the way things went and part of his job was to try to improve their dispositions.

But his basic goal, of course, was the greatest good for the most people—which meant that a minority was sure to be unhappy.

HE HAD been responsible for handling the case of Miss Scroop, the lesbian whom the FCP tests had revealed as fertile. She had announced that she was willing to have children. Her stipulations were that the conception must be brought about by artificial insemination and that she could legally be married to her lover, Miss Windsor.

The great furor over this climaxed in the eighth year after Clabb. *Time* (still a magazine and not a TV station at this time) ran three articles on the two women, giving Canute much favorable publicity. Miss Scroop's employer fired her when she made her announcement and, when Canute could not get the employer to take her back, he hired her as a secretary. The two women received many threatening letters—Canute himself received a hundred. (No telephone calls were made, since every phone automatically showed on its screen the number of the other instrument.) Some public-spirited citizens beat up Miss Scroop's ex-employer.

Miss Scroop insisted that she would not bear children unless she could be legally married. That the Illinois legislature immediately made this possible showed how public opinion had changed. No lawmaker in the

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state would have dared to propose such an enabling act a year earlier.

Ten months later Mrs. Windsor, as she now called herself, bore the first of five children. Jackson watched the interview as she left the hospital with the baby.

TV interviewer: "Mrs. Windsor, are you happy?"

Windsor: "Oh, very. My mate, Glenda, is also very happy."

Interviewer: "Is it true that you're planning to bring up your baby as a lesbian?"

Windsor: "You (censored), if I weren't holding my child I'd kick you right in the (censored). Get out of my way, you (censored) man, you!"

The interviewer had dared to say in public what many had said in private or in letters to the news media editors.

In her final interview with *Time* Mrs. Windsor stated that the child would be raised "properly."

"Of course, I was raised by two heterosexuals and look how I turned out. So who knows about Sappho?"

Eventually the two Windsors and the child left Busiris to live in Nova City, the Federal establishment outside Asheville, North Carolina. There they resided in a house some called palatial and there they were free of harassment.

The fertile nun, Sister Gratian, had been released from her vows on the condition she marry and have children. The only fertile man of her faith in Busiris became available when his wife died during childbirth. Mr. Bunding married Sister Gratian, who left him the day after their wedding night. She gave no reason and Mr. Bunding was speechless. Mrs. Bunding lived for a year in an apartment at the other end of town from her husband and then went to Nova City. However, she bore Mr. Bunding six children, all by artificial insemination. The church did not object to the precedure as long as the donor was her own husband.

NOVA CITY had been established by the Federal Government as a center for the "maintenance of the nation's greatest resources." Precedents had been set by several other countries, notably China, Japan, Indonesia, Israel, the United Arab Republic, Brazil and the U.S.S.R. These nations had made it mandatory for fertile women to bear at least seven times and substantial bonuses were awarded for each child. The U.S. Congress liberally funded Nova City and did its best to attract fertile couples to residence there. There were protests that the free and luxurious living

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for the fertiles was discriminatory. The reply, disseminated over the news media, was that not all discrimination was bad. Not if it helped humanity—and especially the United States of America—to survive.

Some radicals proposed that all nations agree to support a single international community where all the fertiles of the world could be gathered. This would form, in effect, a new state. The common language for its citizens would be the newly revised Esperanto or Loglan III—and in time all mankind would have rid itself of the problems and evils of national boundaries, nationalism and differing languages.

The idea sounded good to many, but it was, of course, impossible to get any nation to accept the concept as a workable reality. Each hung on to its own fertiles.

SAN MARINO, the tiny Italian-speaking nation, had one fertile. She and her husband and six children took the highest offer and migrated secretly to the United States to live in Nova City. Furious protests rose from other nations, especially Italy, which had hoped to get her. The husband of the woman was sterile, but he showed a remarkable liberality in view of his faith and permitted his wife to have six more children by artificial insemination. Outcries were heard in the United States that the Federal Government was promoting immorality, but the majority of citizens seemed to approve. It was felt that the need to survive overrode conventional morality.

THE Republic of South Africa (in Year One) had 150 fertile white, 23 Asian and 271 black women. The Republic set up separate equivalents of Nova City for each of the three categories of persons. The Asian women all perished with husbands and children when their transport plane crashed en route to their establishment. A year later the 271 black women died when an ammunition dump next to the establishment exploded. The Republic officials made several explanations about why the dump had been set up next to the black "national resources." Neither the plane crash nor the explosion were ever proved to be anything but accidents. But the black population was enraged, and civil war—or a rebellion, depending upon whose side you were on—flamed. Before the whites finally stamped out the uprising, a raid on the white fertiles resulted in their massacre—only five survived. The black under-

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ground vowed to get these, but the five were smuggled out of the country and came to the U.S., which promised them the highest standard of living.

WEST SAMOA began with four fertile women. This scarcity was common throughout the Polynesian area. Many South Pacific nations and territorial possessions did not have the critical minimum of fertiles needed to ensure the perpetuation of their human populations. A Greater Polynesian Confederation was advocated with all the fertiles relocated on Tahiti, the original homeland (according to some authorities). This was rejected by the nations owning the islands or having mandates over them. Nevertheless, all the fertile men and women of the South Pacific area were sneaked out of their homelands and established in West Samoa. (By now this practice was being called, among other things, wombnaping.) A war between England and the U.S. on one side—defending the Greater Polynesian Confederation—and the French and Chileans on the other side—they wanted their Polynesian fertiles back—seemed to be a possibility if the news media of the countries involved were to be believed.

The Polynesian experiment worked surprisingly well. The East African Bantu Union, formed for the purpose of putting together the fertiles of Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, Rwanda, Urubu, and Mozambique, failed. Tribal differences were too great to surmount—the fertiles eventually went back to their home territories and the Union broke up.

CANADA was the world's second largest nation in area but had a population of only 21,100,000 in Year One. It had 1038 white, 13 Indian and four black fertiles. Every one of the Indians belonged to a different tribe. Of the blacks, one lived in Toronto, one in Quebec, one in Saskatoon and one in Vancouver. The 13 Canadian Indians invited the 33 fertile Amerinds in the United States to come live with them on the shore of the Great Slave Lake, where a new Indian nation would be started. The idea was that the small group would form the nucleus of a tribe that would eventually spread out into the North American wilderness. They would live much as had their pre-Columbian ancestors, except that they would have certain indispensable gadgets, of course.

The U.S. objected to its Indians

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leaving its territory (this was while it was defending the Polynesians' rights to leave theirs). The 33 Indians sneaked into Canada anyway and, while extradition proceedings were dragging, Canada and the U.S. merged into the United States of North America, the U.S.N.A.

The newly created tribe—calling itself The First Men—adopted English as its common language. Many years later, when the tribe had expanded through the great land which had reverted to wilderness, it presented the curious phenomenon of Amerinds speaking English and named, because of their origin, Slavs. (Slav was the pronunciation of Slave, from The Great Slave Lake.)

July, Year Twenty

BUSIRIS had lost 40,000 of its citizens, mostly to the graveyard. It had also gained fifty, but had lost them to Nova City. These were the children of the children who had been under sixteen in Year Zero, B.C. They had moved out with their parents.

It was strange, Canute thought, to drive through the city and not see a single person under twenty. In fact, not many under thirty were visible.

The number of empty houses and vacant lots was beginning to be noticeable. The Government now tore down houses as soon as they became ownerless. The lots were turfed, planted with trees and flowers. They not only gave a parklike appearance to residential areas, but ensured that when the re-expanding population eventually arrived it would find a more welcoming vista than over grown ruins.

The long-range plan was to level all of the city gradually, step by step, death by death—one future day a visitor might never know that Busiris had stood here until he came to the stele in the middle of a forest. The stele, already in the project stage, would carry a brief record of the city's history. Even the cemeteries were planned for obsolescence—the wild would take them over when all the living had left.

Canute's grave would be lost with the others—his name, however, would be on the stele. "For all eternity," a government official had told him.

Canute had smiled. How many vanished monuments had been set up for all time? And how long did it take Time to prove that for all human artifacts there was no such thing as forever? Marble was only a little more enduring than bone—then it, too, went the

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way of all matter shaped by man.

The official had correctly interpreted Canute's smile. "But this stele will be of inertum—indestructible. It will last forever!"

Canute had shrugged. "But I will be dead and no children of mine will see my name."

One morning he drove through the South Side, ostensibly on an official checkup, actually just to take a drive. Twenty years ago the area had consisted of slums, tenements and Federal housing projects, breeding grounds of crime, disease and misery. Its habitable buildings, tenanted mostly by blacks but with a minority of poor whites, had needed maintenance. Its yards had been grassless and littered with paper, cans, cigarette butts. Its driveways had been cluttered with rusty or torn-down cars. The uninhabitable buildings had stared through broken windows past obscene letterings and drawings.

Today no sign of the ghetto remained. The inhabitants had been moved into the better residential districts. All buildings had been razed, removed and replaced by grass and trees. The area was now bounded by a man-made lake, stocked with fish.

Protests had accompanied the changes and much conflict had arisen between those moved into choicer areas and people already living there. But the friction had not been as bad as had been expected and twenty years—and relative freedom from want—had reshaped the deghettoized into reasonable facsimiles of middle-class citizenry. The misery and even blood-letting of two decades ago had been generally forgotten.

JACKSON was thinking, as he drove his electric car slowly through the South Side, that Busiris had been lucky in its transitional procedures because it had had a small minority of poor people. The New York City metropolitan area, with its immense minorities, had not yet solved its problems. Nor would it until they were cut down to size even more than had been done. Its pre-decpop population had been 15,000,000. A normal death rate would not have made too radical a change in it, but the suicide and murder rates had increased greatly and the terrible August riots of twelve years ago had cost the area approximately 1,000,000 deaths. The burning of Harlem during the riots, the spreading of the fire to other areas, had resulted in 200,000 deaths in six days. The army, navy and national guard had taken over and a dispersion of the populace had been

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arranged, partly under Federal auspices.

In the general dispersion—the Second Diaspora some called it—Busiris had received 350 of the dispossessed. Most of these were of Puerto Rican descent. Canute had housed them where he could—in the emptied orphanages and grade schools, dwellings vacated but not yet torn down—and then he had fed them out, little by little, to various residential districts. He had easily found jobs for them—at that time a labor shortage had been a major problem. Their adaptation to a middle-sized Midwestern city had not been easy, however, and Canute, as a sort of ombudsman, had put in many weary hours trying to make them happy.

One of them had been Maria Gutierrez, a computer programer, beautiful, dark-eyed, red-haired, in her ealy twenties. Canute's affair with her had begun during Jessica's final illness and after her death he had married Maria.

He was sure that the disparity in their ages would cause trouble, but meanwhile he was enjoying her, especially since she did not complain much about his seldom being at home. Maria had a low-keyed sexual desire. She responded quite satisfactorily but never complained about wanting more. All in all, she was a fine wife for a man in his middle years who was often tired from his labors.

CANUTE glanced into his rearview mirror and saw a steamwagon tailgaiting him. It bothered him to be followed so closely while he was taking a pleasure drive and he slowed to let the other driver pass. The car did pull around, but it suddenly cut in, forcing Canute to kick the brake pedal in all the way. The tires screeched as the steam engine quit and locked the four wheels. The hood of Canute's car rammed into the wrap-around bumper of the wagon.

The man who got out of the car looked familiar to Canute. But not until he saw the revolver did full recognition dawn. He was shocked. Twenty years had passed since the young fellow in the Volkswagen had tried to beat him into the parking slot at the Raywoods High School—the man looked older now, but the stubborn wrongness about him was the same. That wrongness, now emphasized by the pistol, had first jogged Canute's memory.

"What do you want?" Canute asked, feeling his insides coiling coldly. The muzzle of the pistol—a Colt .45 six-shooter, probably a hundred years old and a real col-

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lector's item—looked enormous.

"To pay you back," the man said and then he must have fired the pistol.

CANUTE awoke to pain, dimness and confusion more than once. Eventually he was fully awake in a hospital bed. One bullet, undoubtedly the first, had struck the side of his head a glancing blow. The second had gone into his chest at an angle and come out along the front of his breastbone. The third had pierced his right thigh.

"A police car came along, otherwise the maniac would have emptied his gun into you," the doctor said. "He fired at the police instead and they were forced to kill him."

"But why would he want to kill me?" Canute said. "The incident in the parking lot was minor—and happened twenty years ago."

"He's been in a Los Angeles mental hospital for ten years," the doctor said. "I've read the whole transcript. According to his psychiatrist, he has blamed you for his baby's death and his wife's divorcing him. He claimed a bump the baby got when your cars collided caused the tumor that killed him. There is, of course, no evidence whatever that that's what happened—and in any case, the police records here show that he was responsible for that old accident. Anyway, he escaped six months ago. He stole the revolver and ammunition from a Dodge City museum on his way here. The police learned that a stranger was in town—"

"A stranger in town? Since when has it been illegal to be new in a town?"

"You're still not thinking clearly," the doctor said.

"Oh, yes," Canute said. He thought for a moment. "Yes, I see."

The police force had swelled enormously since Year Zero. Lister had insisted on enough manpower at local levels to keep down riots and help maintain full employment. The standards for the police had been raised at every level, local, state and Federal, and all levels were in constant communication with each other. The numbers of the police had been maintained despite the decline in population. Any policeman was likely to know everyone in his precincts and strangers were immediately spotted. It had become routine for motorized patrolmen to compare any stranger's features with mug shots and films transmitted over the car's phone. Los Angeles must have had Dutton's photos on the air.

The doctor left. When Canute

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awoke again a nurse was standing beside his bed. She was attractive and younger than Jackson Canute.

She smiled and said, "Good afternoon, Mr. Canute. I'm Amanda Tilkeson. How do you feel?"

"Better, after seeing you," he told her.

"Thank you, Mr. Canute. The sensors indicate you're in very good shape. You should be hungry."

"I am," he said.

"The roboserver will bring you your meal," she said. "But the aids will bring your supper."

"Good."

Canute watched her walk away. The hospital was so completely cybernated that one nurse could manage a whole floor. But Lister had said—no doubt a medical psychologist had written that particular speech—that cybernation was only an aid in hospital care and that the sick needed humans around.

CANUTE had written his autobiography in his off-moments during the past ten years. Publishing individual works was now the Government's business and Jackson had had no trouble getting his life story and thoughts into print. What would or would not sell no longer decided acceptance of a book. Lister had long ago announced publicly that he wanted "every voice in the land to be heard."

The Government could not, of course, print and distribute a million copies of every book submitted to it and it would have been undemocratic to set up committees of learned and distinguished critics to screen out the "bad" stuff. The problem had been tackled at first by printing cheap editions of every manuscript submitted, regardless of merit, and limiting the number of copies. Distribution had been through the "feedies" or Federal stores. The books had been given to those who asked for them. When the supply was gone no more books had been printed unless they had received a good rating by readers. About half of the readers had used the rating machines in the stores and about one-eighth of the books had been reprinted in larger editions and for wider distribution.

The system had soon proved unworkable—it was too happenstance. Many worthwhile works had been lost forever while trash survived. Critics had discussed books on television shows and often they had decided a book's fate. Sometimes the critics had had personal axes to grind. The situation had served, however, to define the problems and point up a need and soon Lister had had his top

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cybernetists working on solutions.

They had come up with one.

Every citizen today was issued a number of linders. These, named after their inventor, George Linder, consisted of "books" thirty centimeters square by six centimeters thick and weighing thirty-two grams. Each contained, on delivery, ten thousand blank pages. The owner could then get from the feedie a cassette (the size of a match folder) containing, in coded electronic form, an entire book. He would plug the cassette into the back of the linder and connect the works to the household electric power source. With the book on a flat surface, he would rub the indicated spot on the cassette with his thumb or the end of a pencil and the linder would start operation. Minutes later, the cassette would trill and the owner could disconnect the power source. Opening the linder he would find the book he wished to read printed out, with illustrations in color.

When the owner was through with the book he could erase it. If he intended to read the particular work again he kept the cassette. Otherwise he returned the cassette. The linders were reusable almost indefinitely.

The cassettes could also be plugged into a TV adapter to display the contents of the book on the screen. A manual remote-control device regulated the speed of the display.

For the first time in history anybody who wanted to publish could do so within certain limits. The original printing of the work of any previously unpublished author was confined to fifty thousand cassettes. If there was a demand for more, the Government would fill it. Publishing credits entitling an author to larger printing accrued automatically and were based on reader demand.

CANUTE's autobiography had been received well in Busiris but outside the city he was little known. Amanda Tilkeson, the nurse-technician, dropped into his hospital room now and then to discuss the book with him. She admired it very much. Canute did not really think much of its intrinsic interest or literary merits, but it was pleasant to have someone admire it. Maria had read it but had said that she had had difficulty getting through it. Canute discovered another bond between himself and Amanda. She was a fishing and boating nut, as was he—Maria hated to get out on the water—and they talked about water sports.

All in all, after the pain lessened

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and he could get out of his cybernated bed into a cybernated wheelchair, Canute enjoyed the hospital stay. Maria, very much concerned at first, began to reveal a side of herself he had not seen before. She seemed to resent the rapport between Canute and Amanda—possibly she was remembering her own first meetings with him while he had still been married to Jessica.

She now said that the reason she had not liked his autobiography had been that it reminded her of how much he had neglected her. When he told her that it was news to him that she felt neglected at all she went into a tirade.

"Don't give me that *jazz* about sacrificing yourself for others! You like what you're doing! You prefer working to being with me. I bore you. But your work doesn't. So you're being selfish—you're not doing what you do to help people. You couldn't care less for them."

"What's the difference?" he asked. "It's the results that count. And whether I help all these people because I want to help or because I feel a compulsion to do this sort of work doesn't matter. I admit I'm selfish and shallow. So what? The local affairs run smoothly—people are taken care of and helped and I'm happy, regardless of my motives."

"Then why don't you care about making me happy?"

He was honestly puzzled and surprised, but he did not particularly care.

"If I sat around at home watching TV and discussing your problems in raising our dogs—then *I* would be unhappy. It's up to you to find something to keep yourself from being bored. I've asked you a thousand times to come down to work in the office."

"That makes me so tired I could vomit!"

She left him with a cold kiss on his cheek and a frown. Amanda came in shortly and, though she said nothing she acted as if she had been listening in on the intercom. Her expression was one of sympathy.

"If you got married again," he asked, "would you want to work or be a housewife?"

"Work," she said. "If I could have children—well, that would be different. I had one child just before Clabb. She's twenty-five now and sterile. But she's working in Nova City."

She stopped. A red light was pulsing on the instrument panel. Outside, the footsteps of a woman hurrying toward the room could be heard. A nurse entered.

"Mr. Guglielmo's dead!" she told Amanda. "And just a minute

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ago he seemed in fine health—"

She did not cry but she looked as if she would like to.

"He was such a good man!" she said. "Even if he was a rotten writer—"

Canute had never heard of the man.

"You just gave him a nice epitaph," he told the nurse. "Better that than the other way around."

April, Year Thirty-five

BUSIRIS, Illinois, had a population of 100,000. Its youngest citizen was thirty-five years old, its oldest, 101. The death rate was accelerating as the median age rose. Materially man had "never had it so good," Lister's successor kept telling the U.S.N.A. This was true—yet the suicide rate, once stabilized, had again started to inch upward. Use of liquor and marihuana was on the rise—more and more citizens seemed to be commited to slow self-destruction. The HSGs—hypersexogenics—were making superstuds and supermares of the older citizens. They sometimes suffered unfortunate side-effects—heart failures or strokes. The Government had tried, not too vigorously, to take the HSGs off the market, but the resulting storm of protest forced the authorities to make them available again. Some citizens claimed that the Government did not really care—that it would just as soon kill off its older citizens as quickly as possible—but few paid any attention to this cynical reasoning.

Canute was sixty-three and feeling, at times, the old wounds from the South Side Park shooting. He still held the CONES chairmanship but had turned over most of his duties to younger members. Maria had died three years ago, possibly because of a dose of HSG she had taken, though the coroner said that this could not be proven. Canute had married Amanda Tilkeson after a decent interval.

Today he and Amanda were on a fishing trip. They had left home before dawn. He still lived in the mansion on High View Drive, though the place was becoming more of a problem than a pleasure. He was forced to do most of the painting, repairing, plumbing, wiring and so forth himself. The professional plumbers, electricians and painters were too few and too prone to go off on extended vacations. Their services could seldom be obtained. Canute had attended a home-owner's training school and had learned just about everything he needed to know to maintain a house—even so he had sealed off most of the mansion. He and

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Amanda contented themselves with about six rooms.

They drove before sunrise along the top of the bluff overlooking miles of the moonlit Illinois River, then descended. At the foot of the bluffs they cut across an area that had once been crowded with the modest homes of workers of the Earthmover Diesel Company. These were now gone—a young forest rose in their place. Canute took the river road to the Ivory Club, the members of which still kept their exclusiveness. He and Amanda set out on the river in his comfortable, steam-driven four-sleeper—they anchored on the other side of the river, away from all signs of civilization, and watched the sun come up over the hills.

The river was different from what it had been during mornings Canute remembered from his boyhood. The water was pure. He could look down into it for many feet and see the fish as the sun rose higher.

The stock was as it had been when the white man had first come here—he saw large river trout, pike and catfish.

He set out his lures and sat looking across the river, west and south, where the downtown section of Busiris had been—rather, still was. The city hall and jail, the Federal, state and city official buildings were there, but they were only two stories high and hidden by the tall trees. The high buildings—the old courthouse, the Busiris Life Insurance building, the Champlain Hotel, the Earthmover Diesel Building—had all been torn down. To go downtown was to go into another park.

"You know, Amanda," he said softly, "there are still people who curse Clabb. But he saved the world—he really did. If things had gone on as they were, with the expanding population and increasing pollution and breakdown of the economic and educational systems, mankind would have reverted to savagery. Some day, maybe, a statue will be erected to Clabb and he'll take his proper place in the history books."

"I wonder whatever happened to him," she said.

"He'd be eighty-six years old now, so he may be dead. But if he isn't he ought to know that he stands a chance of being ranked among the greatest—if not the greatest—at least by some people. With Lister next."

"I still don't like his having deprived me of having more children."

"Look at it this way," Canute argued. "He saved you the possibility of heartbreaks, of bitterness, of disappointment."

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"My children would have loved me, taken care of me in my old age," she said.

"Don't get mad," he said. "But your children and you would probably have perished years ago. Or, if you had survived you'd be living in some stacked slum or wandering the Earth, looking for a chance to breathe. And you wouldn't have gotten any geriatric care, either. You'd be an arthritic, mostly toothless old woman instead of the beautiful and healthy, almost girlish woman you are."

Jackson knew by now how to make a wife happy.

On the way home he and Amanda passed a demolition rig taking down the old Williams mansion, which had been built a hundred and ten years ago. Dr. Williams and his wife had died within a few days of each other. The rig consisted of several big machines and one man who controlled everything through the console in his vehicle. He sat there, watching the machines work together.

April, Year Seventy

OF THE four billion Earth population alive seventy years ago, 500 million remained. Several million might still be alive in another thirty years. In another thirty-five years, perhaps a dozen or so.

There were thirteen million who had not been alive when Clabb published his letter. The children of the fertiles had been having artificially induced twins, triplets and even quintuplets during the past twenty years, but this custom was tapering off. Why fill the world again faster than Nature desired?

Busiris had a population of 35,000, none of whom was under seventy years old. The town was being phased out and it was probable that it would have a zero number of citizenry in five years or less. More and more were needing hospital care and the "younger" ones just were not up to taking care of the older, even with the cybernated facilities available. Even computers—some said especially computers—broke down. Their electromechanical eyes and hands and feet failed and technicians and engineers were needed to repair them. There were few of these left in Busiris and outsiders were being brought in with increasing frequency to attend to emergencies.

The helpless aged were being moved to Chicago, where the Government—the youngest in the nation's history—had built a hospital-metropolis, already planned for obsolescence. In about fifteen

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years the hospital city itself would be a ghost town and exactly what was to be done with the superannuated phantoms roaming its corridors had not yet been decided. Probably the nonagenarians would be moved again, this time to Indianapolis. Illinois would then be even emptier of man than it had been when the pre-Columbians lived there. The roads were still being maintained by cybers tended by a small staff of septuagenarians under middle-aged supervisors—children of the fertiles and themselves fertile.

Canute, ninety-eight years old, sat in a cybernetic chair and watched TV through organ-bank eyes he had been given twenty years before. His hearing organs, his heart, many miles of veins and arteries, were plastic. His brain and circulatory system had been subjected for three years to a chemical that broke up and helped flush out the fatty deposits. Despite all these biological auxiliaries Canute felt that he was going to die any minute now. Something, somewhere in his body, had broken.

The President of the U.S.N.A. was speaking. He was only thirty years old. His face and head were cleanshaven, the style of the last twenty years for young men. He wore a black velvetone sleeveless shirt piped with gold and a knee-length canary-yellow kilt with embroidered red, white and blue chevrons and that was all. And he was—yes, he was proposing that the U.S.N.A. join the World Federation.

The concept of the World Federation had first been voiced by the premier of the SIND (Swedish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish) Union. The proposal, now endorsed by President Windom, was that within the next twenty years, since most of the pre-Clabbians would soon be dead, the post-Clabbians of the entire world migrate to a megalopolis to be built near Nice, France. Its citizens would have one nationality—Terran—and the language would be Loglan IV, the ancestor of the synthetic world language created in the middle twentieth century. From this megalopolis, to be named Terra City, the World Federation would expand outward and there would never again be more than one nation. New provinces would be created, but they would be part of the Commonwealth.

The surviving old people of all nations would be transported to a geriatric complex in Terra City as soon as facilities permitted.

President Windom did not stress this last—he did not wish to arouse the prejudices of the old citizens while they were still relatively

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numerous. One thing was obvious —the citizens of Terra City would be getting rid of the racial problem forever. It had, of course, already vanished to large extent —the fertiles had been encouraged to interbreed freely and their children had upped the tempo.

Windom himself would once have been called a black who was married to a white woman. Now few people used such terms. The World Federation planners envisioned a single race of Man, whose ancestors were of all the races.

Except the Amerinds of Canada, Canute thought, who would probably refuse to enter Terra City. And generations hence, when Europe, Africa, Asia, South America and Australia had been reoccupied by the expanding human race—what about North America? Once again it would be the property of the red man. What then? Would a highly civilized, highly cybernated society of the Terrans face a barbaric sylvan society of the Amerinds? War? Conquest again? Or would man by then have learned his lesson?

Was it a good sign that the youth of all the nations seemed so alien to its still surviving ancestors? The phenomenon was not unprecedented, though the generation gap, the communication gap, had never been so wide. Pre-Clabb and post-Clabb simply did not understand each other.

The national Government had long since been taken over by the post-Clabb people and President Windom's generation had stretched the gap further. All extra-Nova City citizens had been disenfranchised. They could elect state and local officials, but the Federal Government was forever out of their control.

Windom had declared four years ago that the old people no longer understood the young ones who had been raised and educated in Nova City. Disenfranchisement had followed. Many angry oldsters had raged about revolution, but the structure of their highly cybernated economy of abundance put them at the mercy of the central authority. Pressure on a button would cut off electric power anywhere in the nation. And nothing electromechanical would move. Besides, the oldsters had no weapons and were, to put it plainly, too old to act anyway.

The Nova Citizens and their counterparts the world over were said to be almost entirely free of mental illnessess and neuroses. They acted on a rational basis, were free of superstition and prejudice and had even rid themselves of the sexual jealousies that man

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had always prized as an integral part of his morality. Their society stressed total personal freedom among its members to cooperate in the enrichment of human experience and progress—whatever these meant.

Canute sat and half-dozed, dimly aware that the President had long ago quit speaking and that a comedy show and a documentary had followed and another of the many nostalgia programs was beginning. This one, it happened, was set in the year 1990.

Canute took a stimulator tablet and sat up to watch it. The nostalgia shows were more funny than the comedy shows. The year 1990, as Canute remembered it, was not something to get mushy or even slightly regretful about.

Two minutes passed and he was just beginning to chuckle at the commentary when suddenly the show was cut off.

Canute sat up still straighter. His heart began to hammer as he heard the news announcement. President Windom had just been shot and killed. The assassin had then killed himself. He had been a member of the President's inner circle of friends, though lately they had been known to have disagreed on certain policies and particularly on Presidential appointments. The assassin's wife had recently accepted—against her husband's wishes—a confidential White House post. . .

Canute settled down in his chair and laughed a little shrilly. His faith in the instability and corruptibility of human nature had been restored. There would be no supermen, no utopia. There would continue to be need for men like himself, unflappable, adaptable —men who could make a nonutopian society work simply by selfishly doing their jobs.

Not a thing wrong with a little selfishness, as he had once pointed out to Maria? Clabb had unselfishly destroyed a generation—and probably himself. Lister had selfishly teamed up with men like Jackson Canute to save what was left. Windom's assassination had been an equally unselfish act—it had destroyed the assassin. Somewhere a man was waiting to save himself —and quite incidentally his fellows —from this latest disaster.

Jackson closed his eyes. It gave him, the always rational man, satisfaction to know that mankind remained as capable of madness as ever.

Other men's madness gave sanity a chance. . .

Jackson Canute suddenly felt both human and invincible. *Play it cool,* he told himself, *and perhaps even when death comes. . .* ★

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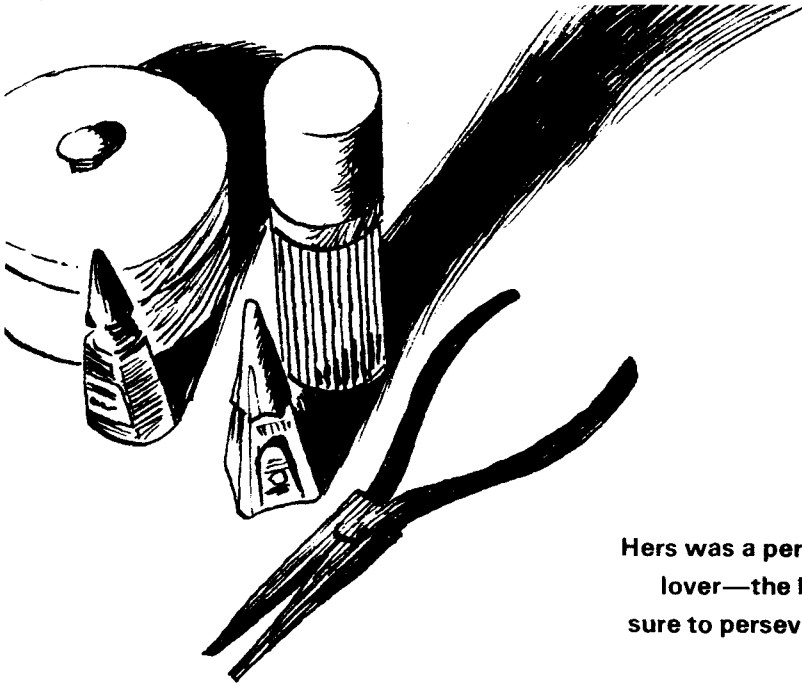

Hers was a perfect lover—the kind sure to persevere!

WOMAN'S RIB

THOMAS N. SCORTIA

IT was while they were dressing for the party that she looked into the mirror and saw death. What she experienced was not an amorphous foreboding of death but rather the knowledge of it as a clinical certainty—it could come tomorrow or the next day or perhaps the next year. But death was suddenly sure and irrevocable, measured out in days and months rather than in the decades she had once expected as a matter of course.

When you are young, she thought, *death is an infinite distance away . . .*

Death existed for the young only

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in the sudden violent end, the brutal bewildering accident that stopped the heart suddenly, that stilled the fever of the limbs in an instant. She herself had never thought of death until two years ago when she had been in Sweden to deliver the Nobel lecture and had nearly lost her life in a street accident. During the long convalescence she had become oppressed with the idea of dying.

And now—*For me death is as inevitable as tomorrow's sunrise.*

And perhaps as close.

He came out of the sonic shower, a tanned mass of flesh—now bright red from the sonic-water blast—and muscles, hard and beautifully muted by the thin layering of firm fat that a man of thirty developed. His voice was booming.

"Come on, Ellen, why the funk?"

She looked into the mirror, noting that her hair was of a too even chemical color, that the flesh was sagging around her eyes and that her cheeks were melting in folds of tissue that would tighten only for a few hours after she used her creams and emollients. She was showing the first sign of jowls, she saw. The flaccid tissue of her face was suspended by the ligaments but flowed down over the jawline, destroying its definition.

"No funk," she said. "Just thinking."

"You scientists think too much," he said heartily, toweling his head vigorously and then rubbing his massive chest. The coarse black hair between his nipples sprang erect as the towel took its moisture. He rubbed his flanks and his hard indented buttocks.

He was, she decided, quite beautiful, beautiful in a full masculine way that still brought a catch to her breath. Everything about him excited her—the muscled belly with its clear definition, the deeply indented pubic fold, his maleness, darker in tone than the rest of the body, but pure and unmottled, springing in easy authority from a patch of the same bristly black hair that washed darkness across his chest.

"I know you," he said, putting his arm around her bare shoulders and wrinkling her shift in his rough grasp. "I know you too well, Flowergirl."

She winced at the pet name. In the five years they had been together, she had grown to love the caress in his voice when he called her by it. Tonight the phrase was bitter with irony.

"Flowergirl?" she questioned. "Rather, Evening Primrose."

"Morning Glory," he countered, laughing. He swept her up in his arms and bore her back into the bedroom.

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"Frank, we're late."

"Damn the party," he said. "It's for us—for you. For the great Dr. Ellen Marsden. They'll wait on our own good time."

They were on the bed and he was doing things that brought a fear and an excitement to her. The banked fires of her aging body glowed, the fluids of her limbs became turgid with excitement and she looked up into his glowing eyes, knowing the heat of his body, the massive muscularity of his chest. Her feelings toward him built to a crescendo—she was buoyed upward in an incredible fantasy of male odor, male strength, male tenderness. At one climactic instant she looked up and saw that unbelievable blending of lust and love in his eyes and the world exploded in flames. Her brain turned into a core of light that flared and subsided into lassitude and complete fulfillment.

"There," he said at last, breathing heavily. "I've been wanting to do that all day."

"You've messed my hair," she complained, feeling playful and for some reason a little cross.

"Much more," he said, rubbing the hair away from her temples.

She felt as if she had been violently possessed and the feeling was one of wonder and complete satisfaction as always.

"You shouldn't do this sort of thing," she said, trying to sound very prim.

"You wouldn't want it any other way," he accused.

"No," she admitted. "You're perfectly right."

They finished dressing and he fixed her rumpled hair with his big facile hands, completely unconcerned with the problem of hiding the thinning in the crown, the faint scars of the accident, all the ancient signs of attack on the aging organism.

"YOU'RE quite remarkable," she told him as she adjusted her stole.

"So are you," he said. Then: "But it's much the same thing, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said softly. "Yes, it is."

The party was downtown and instead of taking the tube they chose a ground-effects cab and rode silently in the back seat. She was ever conscious of his banked energies, the slow beat of his massive heart beside her, the surging energy of his muscles, and suddenly she felt slight, weak, unequal to the joyous life that animated his limbs. Argon lights flickered past, reflected in the slick of rain that the weather sta-

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tions had scheduled for that evening. The air was already hot and muggy with the rising temperature and humidity, but the first of the programed breezes were beginning to dispell the miasma. She touched her hair several times, hoping that the humidity would not play its usual tricks and dissolve her hairdo into a mass of frizzes and uncontrolled waves.

The ground-effect fan under the cab sighed and the remaining moisture on the pavement outside rippled under the air blast. He put his arm around her and kissed her softly behind the ear. Her heart surged with sudden joy and she nestled against him until her right hand accidently touched the underflesh of her left arm. The flesh was cold and had a tissue-thin quality that frightened her. Her hands, she saw in the passing lights, were still good. There was a suggestion of blue veining, a touch too much bone and sinew, but the color was good. He had found the preparation that bleached the liver spots that had depressed her and had—characteristically—left it on top of the water closet, lid off, as though he himself had been using it. He had found this easy diplomatic way of meeting the problem, just as he had found ways of showing her how to use makeup to disguise the first wrinkling, tint to fade away the gray without giving her hair a grotesque look.

She shook her head, wondering if another man like him walked on the face of the Earth.

He helped her to the curb and paid the driver, counting the plastic chits. The doorman opened the door and in seconds the tube whisked them to the fifteenth floor where sounds of people laughing permeated the corridor. The door of the apartment at the far end of the corridor was open and she could hear the sound of a multifi, beating out the dissonant rhythms of the latest mauve beat. The music ended in mid-phrase and, after a second of mechanical indecision, began again. *Eleanor Rigby,* she realized with quick nostalgia. By the original Beatles. A flood of memories engulfed her for an instant. Was this the common denominator of age, that the most casual sounds from the past would plunge one into this mood of bitter-sweet nostalgia?

Where were the Beatles now, she wondered? She remembered the story of John Lennon and his lovely Japanese wife—what had been her name? No matter. It was all a part of the past that she would never revisit. Better the now. Only the now.

She squeezed his arm posses-

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sively. Only the now and forget the tomorrow. Tomorrow would come soon enough.

"Ellen," Betty Margriet said at the door. "Frank, we thought you would never come."

"My fault," Frank said. "I'm a bum about dressing."

"Frank, you beautiful thing," Betty said, "you could never be a bum." She pulled them into the room and conveyed them like a small busy tug escorting great ships through the harbor.

"Lance, you've met Ellen and Frank? George, this is Ellen Marsden and her beautiful Frank—"

"Dr. Marsden, how good to meet you. I've been looking—"

"Come along, Ellen, there's a fabulous man I want you to meet and—Frank, Frank, what's your secret? You don't ever seem to—"

TALK, talk, talk. The chatter quite overwhelmed Ellen. Frank was smiling beside her, saying just the right thing, always self-contained, still bright and spirited while she felt the first fatigue invade her body. On the far side of the room she saw Vaslov with whom she had had the terrible argument over nucleoproteins at the seminar the week before. No matter. Professional and personal conflicts were of a different order.

And Goldschmidt, with his huge Roman nose and gentle eyes, was waving at her from a solid group, his delicate artist's hands clutching what appeared to be a martini. She knew that it was only a glass of water with an olive, an innocent deception. Flanking him were two fat men she had never seen—facing him a thin wispy girl of perhaps twenty-eight and a man in black. As the black-clad man turned Ellen recognized Dr. Melton of the Theological School. She raised her eyes in surprise. To see him at a party was unusual.

Then they were in tow again, she and Frank, with Betty still gushing, ever ready to show off her distinguished guest. Finally Betty left them alone and Ellen sighed and said, "My God, that was a chore."

Frank laughed. "The penalty of greatness."

"Greatness is a term loosely used nowadays."

"Well, fame then," he said. She patted his arm.

Goldschmidt came over and said, "My dear Ellen, how lovely you look." His poet's eyes with long almost feminine lashes said, *I mean it—you are beautiful.* "And Frank, it is good to see you."

"I'm delighted to see you too, Aaron."

"Your seminar the other day

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still has me muttering in my beard," Goldschmidt told Ellen.

"That was the idea," Ellen said. "The concepts themselves aren't new."

"Just looking at the other side of the coin—but what a difference in insight that can make."

"You two can talk shop five days a week," Frank said. "Tonight I refuse to allow you to ignore me."

"Of course." Goldschmidt laughed and bowed. "I am being rude."

"Not at all, Aaron," Frank said. "As though there were a time when you could offend me."

Goldschmidt grabbed both of them by the arm and propelled them forward, his eyes alive with excitement. "What a gift God has given me," he said, "to have two such friends as you. Now, come there are some lovely people I want you to meet."

THEY walked across the room, winding their way through a group of dancers who had begun one of the intricately figured Rack numbers. She considered idly how similar they were to the round dances of her grandmother's youth. Similar and yet different with couples separated, distant, aesthetically alienated. The problem of the age was—she held herself close to Frank—that people, even people in love, lived out their lives in a special no-contact isolation. She glanced at Frank and thought, *Never mind why this is special. I would do it again. I have what is important. I have a being who is a part of me with no walls, no barriers, nothing between us that would intrude. For you I would give everything. For your happiness I would sacrifice everything* . . .

She caught herself, realizing that she was becoming maudlin. She usually didn't give into such intense emotions. Yet her thought had been an expression of truth. And she realized that only she knew the depths of that truth.

She and perhaps Goldschmidt, who could not help but be a part of it.

Dear Aaron, she thought. *Dear friend, dear.* . .something else? Well, no matter. He knew the limitations and he was willing to accept them. Which was the tragedy and the glory and the bitterness of what they had done together.

Goldschmidt said, "This lovely young thing is Celia Harris." The wispy girl smiled uncertainly. Her eyes, big and colored like a fawn's, were frightened. Ellen felt a sudden identification with the girl.

The perennial wallflower—my dear, how well I know you . . .

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"And Dr. Melton," Goldschmidt was saying. "You know Dr. Melton, Ellen?"

"Yes," Ellen said deliberately. "I'm afraid Dr. Melton doesn't approve of me."

"I have no idea where you got that misconception," Melton said, coloring.

"When one faculty member attacks the philosophy of another's work," Ellen said, "the whole university knows about it in a day."

"I have apparently been misquoted," Melton said, blushing more deeply.

"Wonderful," Goldschmidt said. "We have the start of a stimulating discussion to enliven an otherwise dull evening."

"Oh, really?" Celia Harris asked and then looked startled.

"I'm sorry, my dear," Goldschmidt said. "It's just that we oldsters are more in love with ideas than with people."

"This whole dabbling with the very substance of life bothers me," Dr. Melton said.

"I would suppose so," Ellen said.

"He is concerned with God's preogatives." Goldschmidt's eyes were mischievous.

"Not at all," Melton said ponderously.

"But of course," Goldschmidt insisted.

The background music changed. "My God," Frank said, "they're actually playing a waltz."

"How nice," Celia Harris said.

"Frank," Ellen said, looking at the wispy girl and remembering long ago. "Frank, why don't you ask Miss Harris to dance."

"Oh, I couldn't—" she began.

"Of course, you could." Frank's bull heartiness cut across the conversation.

How beautiful she is, Ellen thought. *How beautiful and how frightened.*

"Thank you," Celia Harris said as she and Frank drifted away.

"IS THAT what you want?" Goldschmidt asked *sotto voce.*

"It is what I want," Ellen said fiercely.

"You see, you make a fundamental error in your work," Dr. Melton persisted. "An error almost traditional, certainly classical."

"I don't follow you."

"Molecular biology is a half-century old," Melton said. "Who knows when you will take the ultimate step?"

"The ultimate step?" Goldschmidt grinned. "What, dear sir, is the ultimate step? Indeed, is there an ultimate step?"

"You work with the molecules of memory, of personality," Melton said. "You have defined

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all the biochemical processes essential to a self-perpertuating system—to life, if you prefer. You've learned to generate a complete organism from a few random specialized cells and you've even reached the point of building new organisms over structures of plastic and metal by this technique."

"Of course," Goldschmidt said. "The cloning technique began in the early seventies. You know, growing whole frogs from just a few cells of frog intestine."

"Eventually," Melton said, "you must try to duplicate human life—or improve it."

"Now he has said it." Goldschmidt chuckled.

"What makes you think so?" Ellen demanded.

"The nature of the beast," Melton said. "I dread the result."

"That's too common an emotion," Goldschmidt said. "Almost a racial phenomenon—as expressed in that abomination by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley."

"Oh, that?" Melton said. "I'm sure you're more subtle and adept than Mrs. Shelley's poor creator. Nevertheless, the heresy—"

"A good Anglican talking about heresy?" someone asked.

"The word is hard for an Anglican to use," Melton admitted. "Nevertheless, Catholic dogma has many beautifully defined moral paradoxes. Some of the best minds of the last five centuries have contributed to Church thinking."

"The heresy you mentioned?" Goldschmidt prompted.

"The heresy of Valentinius the Gnostic," Melton said. "Basically, the idea that the created being suffers from the imperfections built into him by an imperfect creator."

"Beautiful." Goldschmidt was still amused. "Quite beautiful. Of course, I've heard of this. It's a lovely linear proposition. However, we have seen that logical linearity is not necessarily—"

"Spare me, Aaron," Melton said. "You know how we—"

"That was lovely," Celia Harris said, interrupting. She and Frank had returned and her fawn eyes were alive. Ellen looked at her and knew.

It always happened. Frank had that special wordless communication with women—Ellen had never seen one who, exposed to it, had not instantly and completely fallen in love with Frank. It was how she had wanted him to be—now, she realized, his talent had a special value she had not planned.

"The special significance of the heresy," Melton was saying, "is—"

"What heresy?" Frank asked and Melton told him.

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"You know—" Frank clapped Melton on the shoulder—"you beautifully logical people always seem to avoid seeing the total consequences of an idea."

"I don't follow you."

"What I mean," Frank said, "is that the reverse must be true. That the perfections that a created being enjoys reflect an equally perfect creator."

"Rubbish," Melton said and then colored anew.

"Is it?" Goldschmidt demanded. "Or does the creation imply the creator?"

Melton said nothing.

AFTER that the conversation degenerated. Frank, at Ellen's silent gesture, asked Celia to dance again and Ellen wandered away. There was a point, she decided in her fatigue, when exercising one's mind became a chore and she felt little like thinking at this moment. She found a seat on a Kawasaki couch and relaxed into a state of quiescence. Across the room Frank and the girl danced and Ellen watched the glowing new emotion in the girl's eyes. She knew a faint twinge of regret and then a sense of pure, overwhelming triumph.

Finally she felt that her face was wilting and decided to freshen up. She rose tiredly from the couch, counting the thousand small pains that were the heritage of her aging human body, and walked past the heavy drapes into the hall. She had not intended to be secretive or furtive but her movements were slow and silent. She came upon two women and stopped, not wishing to intrude. They were standing, smiling and talking, near the massive Tokagawa vase with its incredible dragons rampant on gilt and ochre. Ellen heard most of the conversation before the women saw her.

"Isn't he a beautiful man?" one said.

The other, short and vulgarly pretty, asked, "What does he see in her?"

"God knows," the first one said. Her thin lips twisted. "She's plain enough. I imagine she always was, even when she was young. Who knows what motivates men?"

"I wish I knew what motivated that one," the short woman said.

"He seems to be very motivated at the moment."

"Yes." The short one wet her lips. "If I were Dr. Marsden I'd watch my young Greek god very closely."

"She's such a frump. How does she hold on to him?"

"Who knows? I first saw him five years ago when she suddenly showed up with him and he's been

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like a shadow to her ever since."

"No accounting for bad taste—"

"Pardon me." Ellen spoke too loudly, pushing past them. There was a certain amount of bitchiness in her tone, she realized, and both women looked alarmed and then satisfied.

How we tear each other's hearts out, Ellen thought sadly as she opened the door to the restroom.

Later she found Frank and Aaron talking quietly and said, "I'm very tired."

"Of course," Frank said, ever solicitous. "Would you like to go?"

"Tomorrow," Goldschmidt said. "I'll certainly see you tomorrow."

"I suppose so," she said.

He reached out to touch her arm tenderly. "Ellen, you tire too easily these days. You must take good care of yourself."

"Thank you, Aaron. You were always a good friend."

"And more."

"I wish it could have been."

"No matter," he said. "I have done everything I could. You and Frank—" He spread his hands eloquently. "You know, Frank is like a son to me."

"Rather a brother," Frank said seriously.

"And, alas—a rival."

"Thank you," Ellen said tiredly.

"Do take care of yourself," he said again.

SHE left the party with Frank and thought of how Aaron had stood beside her, sustained her, encouraged her. She had not meant matters to turn out as they had, but she and Aaron had been so much more successful than they had dreamed they would be. And finally he had protected her and her special knowledge, knowing that he was robbing himself of what he wanted most.

For it would not have done for them to publish this triumphant breakthrough, not after what had happened. Poor little wallflower who had devoted herself to thought and science and knowledge and longed for love. Only Aaron knew the full flowering of her desire, the months of work and hope that had finally created the one thing that had given her life meaning. Aaron could never have met her need—for she would not compromise—but like a good friend he had helped and given that special part of himself. The success she had found, the triumph, were equally his.

In the taxi Frank said, "You seem lost."

"I was thinking of Aaron."

"He loves you, you know," Frank said.

"I know," she said. "I wish it had worked the other way."

"He doesn't expect the situation

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to change," Frank said. "That doesn't alter the fact that there is nothing he would not do for you."

"I know that too well," she said sadly.

At home they disrobed and she sat brushing her hair, seeing the faint tinge of gray under the dye. She would wither and age, she knew, in the coming months. It was only a matter of time before the feral thing tearing at her vitals would destroy her. And Frank? What would happen to Frank, who had come into her life a bare five years before?

Frank, who was maleness and youth and naivete and would go on for years, perhaps centuries, because she had wanted it that way.

He came to her and put his arms around her. "You know I will always love you."

"I know," she said. "After all, I planned it that way. Aaron and I —we made it so."

He laughed. "Do you think this bothers me?"

"It should," she said.

"I would have wanted to love you, regardless."

"Would you?"

"The created being reflects the faults and the virtues of the creator," he said. "Remember?"

"I find that hard to believe."

"It's true," he said, his arms enfolding her.

"You know this can't last much longer."

"I've known that for quite some time."

"What will you do then?"

"Whatever you wish."

"That girl tonight—"

"Celia?"

"Yes. She's so much as I used to be. Lonely and unloved and uncertain."

"She's quite beautiful—as you are."

"Oh," she said, "how I envy her. You know it's only a matter of time before I—" She paused, not finishing the sentence, testing his understanding one last time.

He grasped her meaning instantly, perfectly as always.

"Is that what you want?" he asked. "For someone like you to take your place?"

"Yes," she said. "I think she needs you very much—as I needed you. I think she would be quite wonderful for you, too."

"I hoped you would say that," he said, kissing her.

"You're so much more than I intended," she said, melting into his great arms.

"I could only be what you wished me to be," he said, kissing her again.

She felt his body close to her and his arms were gentle. Gentle, but like steel. ★

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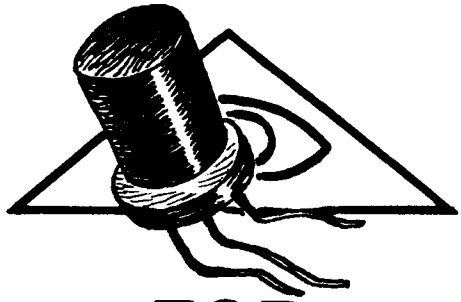

FOR G.O.D.'s SAKE

DAVID GERROLD

Harlie knew the difference between right and wrong—and found both good!

I

AUBERSON was walking down the flourescent-pale hallway to his office when he saw the flash and bob of her red hair. She saw him at the same time and smiled, waved and quickened her step. He could think of no way to avoid her.

"Hi, what's up?"

"I should be asking you. Where have you been all week?"

"Busy," he said.

"Obviously. I just came from your office. It looks a mess. Sylvia says you haven't stopped running since Monday."

"That's only two days." He smiled. "Though it does seem a lot longer."

"Have you had lunch?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Well, then—come on." He

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tried to protest, but she took his arm and turned him around, saying, "It's on me. I'll put it on my expense account. It's all part of my campaign to keep a scientist from starving."

He smiled again and allowed himself to be led down the hall. "Your card was nice. I was going to send you one, but I haven't had a chance to go looking."

"So why not telephone? Call me collect if you want. Any time."

He was embarrassed. "Uh, I haven't had the chance."

They decided to avoid the company cafeteria and go to a quiet place in town instead. They paused at the plant gate long enough for Auberson to buzz his office and tell his secretary that he would be gone for at least an hour and a half. While she was waiting, Stel lowered the convertible top and pulled a pale blue scarf from his glove compartment. She had put it there for precisely this type of occasion. She was trying it on when David came back.

As he got into the car she said, "I'm going to have to put a couple more of these things in here—this blue doesn't go at all well with this dress."

He laughed, managing a genial, good-natured sound, he thought. He put the car into gear. "Where are we going?"

"How about the Tower Room?"

"Uh-uh. Too many of the wrong kind of people." He paused, then added in explanation: "Company people."

"Okay. If not there, where?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. Let's get lost."

HE SWITCHED on the stereo and eased the car into the light midday traffic. She looked at him. He was a relaxed driver, not like so many who hunched tensely over the steering wheel. Auberson enjoyed driving. The line of his jaw tightened momentarily as he concentrated on the traffic ahead. With one hand he maneuvered a pair of sunglasses out of his coat pocket and onto his nose. The wind whipped at his hair and his tie.

The feel of the road changed abruptly as they swung into the freeway. The tugging fingers of the wind grew stronger as Auberson gunned the little sports car. She waited until he had slid into the far left lane before she spoke.

"What's wrong with company people?"

"Nothing. I just don't want to be seen by them, that's all." The stereo mumbled softly to itself, something about fixing a hole where the rain comes in. He turned it down to a whisper and added: "It wouldn't

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be a good idea. The two of us together, I mean."

"You're afraid people will talk?"

"I don't know. There already is talk, I guess." He frowned at a momentary lumpiness in the stream of traffic.

As he maneuvered through it she turned over in her mind possible things to say, at last decided to say nothing. It was just as well—the moment had passed.

They were gliding above the rooftops of cluttered suburbia—black roofs and red, two-car garages and stationwagons out in front, green pea lawns and a cacophony of architectural voices. Early-American-Almost-Slum next door to Ancient-Gingerbread-With-Original-Icing, followed by Plastic-Cracker-Box and Flagstone-Walking-Pseudo-Californian. Ugly stucco boxes, white walls stained with brown streaks and greasy smoke from countless kitchen windows. Rust outlined screens on the windows of faded apartment buildings. Housewives in shorts were hanging damp sheets on wire lines. Blue-gray mailmen lugged heavy brown bags. Children, too small to be in school, chased after dogs bigger than they were and too smart to be caught. Shopping centers displayed bright glass windows filled with wishes and temptations.

The houses drew closer together, grew taller, became offices, then warehouses, big and featureless and ugly. The office buildings evolved into concrete-and-glass towers. Auberson selected an off-ramp into a narrow canyon with sunglaring walls.

HE REALIZED abruptly that he was heading toward the restaurant where he had taken Stel on their first date. *Now why did I do that?* It was too late to change his mind, though—he swung around a corner and they were there.

She did not mention the choice of restaurant—perhaps she accepted it as an inevitable spot for the two of them. After they had ordered, she looked at him sharply.

"What's the matter, David?"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing, I guess. I just say that sometimes."

"Oh."

She decided to talk about something else. "I hear you've been having trouble with Harlie again."

"No, not with Harlie—because of Harlie."

"Well, you know what I mean. *I* know the whole company is in an uproar. Something about unauthorized specs—I haven't had a chance to pay too much attention

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to it. I've been troubleshooting the annual report for Dorne."

"Oh? I thought that was finished."

"It was supposed to be—but the statistics keep coming out wrong. Actually that means that they keep coming out right."

"Huh?"

She hesitated, then made a decision. "I guess it wouldn't hurt to tell you. The company keeps two sets of books.

He was startled. "Let's try that again."

"Oh, it's nothing illegal," she hastened to explain. "One set is the real books, the other is for public consumption—the stockholders mainly."

"That sounds illegal to me."

She made a face. "It is and it isn't. Let's just say the second set of books is more—cosmetic. It looks prettier. The figures haven't been falsified, merely rearranged. Those, for instance, pertinent to Harlie."

"How?"

"You know and I know that he's a research operation—but some of the directors think his cost is too large a sum to be listed entirely under research. Don't look at me like that, David—I don't make policy and I don't know why this policy was instituted. But apparently some directors feel it wouldn't look good to the stockholders to see that much money being plowed back into the business."

"Elzer. Carl Elzer," said Auberson. "He has to be behind this."

"With some others."

Auberson had been jolted into thinking. "The damned looters," he said.

"How's that?"

"You remember how Elzer came into the company? He and Dorne and some of the other directors are part of a financial syndicate—they specialize in taking over companies. They use the assets to widen their holdings—" He snapped his fingers. "That's it—their first concern would be to prop up the price of the stocks, not the health of the company."

"You're starting to lose me."

"I'm not sure I follow it all myself." One thought tumbled out after another. "Look, Stellar-American Technology and Research set up four other companies to handle various aspects of hyperstate electronics. We're one of them. Stellar-American is the majority stockholder in each—but suppose Stellar-American itself becomes vulnerable to a takeover. Get control of it and you've got five companies in your pocket."

"But, how—"

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"I can think of a couple of ways. In order to exploit the hyper-state process Stellar may have had to go heavily into debt. Let's say the process is harder to develop than they thought and expected profits don't materialize—they lose money, they borrow more, they go deeper into debt, all the time betting that they'll be able to make it back because the market is entering an inflationary spiral. This is all guesswork on my part, but a weakness could develop in a situation like that—particularly if some of the assets the company counted on consisted of stock whose price had been propped up by juggling the books. It could be fooled into overextending itself—in which case Elzer and company could possibly move in."

"I thought you were talking about a takeover. No company is going to risk a controlling amount of its stock."

"No," he agreed. "But some top men might risk enough to cut their share of it down—that is, if they were sure that the other major stockholders wouldn't doublecross them."

"Ugh," she made a face. "Wait a minute—what do I know about the actual figures? I think about thirty-six percent of Stellar-American Technology stock reached the open market."

"How do you know that?"

"The figure was in a report I had to process. In order to get the original rights to produce hyper-state units, the directors had to trade a certain number of shares to the man who owns the patents."

"Krofft? Dr. Krofft?"

"I don't know—if that's his name, then he's the one. Anyway, I know for a fact that the inventor owns something like thirteen percent of Stellar-American voting stock."

Auberson whistled. "That would make him a key piece in the puzzle—wonder where he stands. He's director of research over there."

THE waitress came with their food. As soon as she was gone, Stel said, "Okay, let's assume Elzer and Dorne have gotten Stellar-American—what happens now?"

"Well, actually they'd have five companies—Stellar-American and the other four: Hyper-State Visual, Hyper-State Stereo, Hyper-State Modules and Hyper-State Computer, that's us. Each of these companies has a certain value—their assets can be used in several ways. I think Elzer is a vampire. He doesn't understand the difference between saving a company for future potential and milking it of its resources now."

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"Do you think that's what he's up to now—milking the company?"

"Could be the reason he's down on Harlie. If he can't make a lot of money fast both Dorne and Elzer want to discontinue him. I know Elzer's been eyeing his appropriation for some time. Dorne's attitude is a little different—I think theirs is a marriage of convenience. Elzer wants the money; Dorne values the company—and Harlie could be a long-term asset. Apparently Dorne had the pull in the financial community—Elzer has the money, but not the position. At the moment, Dorne is in control—but that could change. Harlie's continued existence depends on Dorne's good will. If he gets pressured too heavily by the rest he may have to throw them Harlie in order to protect himself. That could be why he's let us continue this long—so he'll have a bone to throw the others if he needs one." Auberson looked up from his plate. "The annual report—what does it say about Harlie?"

"Not much."

"How's he listed?"

"That's just it—he isn't. He should be considered part of the research budget, but he doesn't show up there. He doesn't show up anywhere."

"Part of the research budget? He *is* the research budget—two-thirds of it anyway."

"I know, but he isn't listed that way. His cost has been spread out, listed as 'Inplant Improvements' and things like that."

"Now why the hell—" He put down his knife and fork. "Let's backtrack a little. You said there was a problem. The wrong figures kept coming out?"

"No—the right figures did. We set up the final drafts of the report three weeks ago."

"And all the figures were from the second set of books? The phony ones?"

She nodded. "But the report printed out with all the figures corrected—taken from the real books. At first we thought someone had changed it on the copy—you know, someone not in on the secret might have double-checked the figures and changed them—but it wasn't that. Those reports had been fed into the typers exactly as we had composed them."

Something went *twang*. "The typers?"

"Yes, we have a magtyper composer—it's one of the new phototyping units. It was ordered especially for handling reports, brochures and pamphlets and we've hooked it into the master system. That way we can use any typer in the plant for input—you could write a letter in your office and get a perfectly justified printout—any

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type face—off the composer unit. Camera-ready copy."

"Um," said Auberson. "I have a feeling that that's what your problem is—the master system. The master *beast*," he corrected.

"THAT'S what we thought. We've been checking the computer outlets for two weeks now and we can't find a thing. Yet every time we set up a printout we get the same darn figures. We've tried correcting the original tape, feeding it in again and I don't know what all. It's not so much the report any more as finding out why it keeps coming out wrong—ah—right. Well, you know what I mean—with the figures we don't want the stockholders to see. Like one of the things is Harlie. He's listed right at the top of the research budget in the real version—quite prominently—and there's even a paragraph explaining his goals and objectives. Nobody knows where that came from—I thought Elzer would have a fit when he saw it. If we had the new systems analysis network completed, it could tell us where the trouble is originating—but it's nowhere near operational yet, at least not for the master beast. We could always send the report elsewhere to be printed, but that would be personally embarrassing to Dorne—the master beast is his brainchild."

"Mm," said Auberson and nothing more.

"Anyway," she said. "That's what I've been doing for three weeks—running like hell and getting nowhere."

"Oh, they'll probably find the trouble soon enough," said Auberson. "It'll turn out to be a crossed wire or something stupid like that." He sucked in his cheeks and glanced at his watch.

"I hope so," she said. "We're going to try another run this afternoon, just as soon as they finish checking the memory tanks again. If that doesn't work, Dorne is prepared to reschematic the whole system."

"Is it that serious?"

"It is to Dorne."

"Wow—look at the time!" he said. "I'd forgotten it was getting so late. I should be back at the office right now—I'll have phone calls stacked up from one end of the country to the other."

He stuffed a few last bites into his mouth and washed them down with coffee.

Stel was puzzled, but she, too, hurried to finish her lunch. He signaled the waitress.

On the drive back she remarked, "I didn't realize how busy you were, David—I'm sorry."

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There was something about the way she said it. Briefly he took his eyes off the road and glanced at her.

"I just remembered something, that's all. You don't know what I've spent the past two days doing, do you? Covering for Harlie. I've been calling every department head in four different divisions—ours, Los Angeles, Houston and Denver—trying to convince each one that those specifications we sent them are only speculative, that the reason we sent them out was to get their opinion whether or not we should consider implementation."

"I thought that *was* the reason they were sent out."

"It is—but there was no cover letter or anything. The way the specs were delivered a lot of people thought they were file copies of a project that was already approved and ready to be implemented. They thought something had been railroaded through over their heads and they were mad as hell at the implied loss of authority. I've spent two days just picking up the pieces, trying to convince some of these corporate politicians—" he spat the word in disgust— "that no insult has been intended, that what we're after is their opinion on the matter. The trouble is, they're all so prejudiced against the project now because of the way it was delivered that it's an uphill battle."

"I'd heard something about the specs appearing suddenly on Monday morning."

"That's right. Harlie jumped the gun and printed them out because he figured it was the only way he could get anyone to notice them. Otherwise he figured he'd be waiting till the moon fell out of the sky."

"He's got a point there. He knows the company better than you do."

"Yes." Auberson sighed as they swung in at the plant gates. "I'm afraid he does.

II

HE LEFT her at the main entrance and sprinted for his office, attracting puzzled glances on the way. He ignored Sylvia's urgent bid for his attention and locked the door behind him. He had the magtyper switched on even before he sat down.

He paused, still panting heavily, then typed:

MEMO: TO ALL CONCERNED
FROM: DAVID AUBERSON
FILE: PERSONAL, CONFIDENTIAL

IT HAS COME TO MY ATTENTION THAT THERE HAS BEEN SOME DIFFICULTY IN PRINTING THE

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COMPANY'S ANNUAL REPORT. THE RUMOR HAS BEEN CURCULATING THAT MALICIOUS TAMPERING HAS TAKEN PLACE WITH THE CONTENT OF THE REPORT. I WOULD LIKE TO SPIKE THAT RUMOR RIGHT HERE AND NOW. THERE HAS BEEN NO, REPEAT, NO EVIDENCE AT ALL OF ANY MALICIOUS TAMPERING. WHAT HAS PROBABLY HAPPENED IS A MINOR EQUIPMENT FAILURE OF SOME KIND. IT SHOULD BE LOCATED AND CORRECTED SHORTLY AND THE REPORT WILL BE PRODUCED AS IT WAS ORIGINALLY INTENDED. I REPEAT, THE REPORT WILL BE PRODUCED AS IT WAS ORIGINALLY INTENDED. IF NOT HERE, THEN ELSEWHERE. AND IF NECESSARY, WE WILL DISMANTLE EVERY COMPUTER IN THE PLANT TO LOCATE THE FAULT.

THANK YOU,

Before he could switch off the machine, it typed back—seemingly of its own accord: RIGHT ON. A WORD TO THE WISE IS EFFICIENT.

AND I HOPE SUFFICIENT, he replied. YOU'RE PUSHING YOUR LUCK. IF DORNE DISCOVERS YOU'VE TAKEN OVER THE MASTER BEAST YOU'RE DEAD.

Harlie decided to change the subject. WHAT DID YOUR GIRL THINK OF MY POEM?

I DIDN'T SHOW IT TO HER.

WHY NOT? DIDN'T YOU LIKE IT?

I LIKED IT FINE. IT WAS A VERY NICE POEM, HARLIE. YOU'RE GETTING BETTER. BUT I DIDN'T SHOW IT TO HER BECAUSE IT DIDN'T EXPRESS EXACTLY WHAT I WANTED IT TO.

WHAT DID YOU WANT IT TO SAY ?

OH, I DON'T KNOW—SOMETHING LIKE "I LIKE YOU, TOO."

AND MY POEM DIDN'T SAY THAT ?

YOUR POEM SAID, "I LOVE YOU."

WELL, DON'T YOU LOVE HER ?

Auberson looked at the typewritten question for a long time, his hands poised over the keyboard. At last he typed: HARLIE, I REALLY CAN'T ANSWER THAT QUESTION. I DON'T KNOW IF I DO OR NOT.

WHY NOT?

HARLIE, THIS IS A COMPLEX SUBJECT. LOVE IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND—IT'S EVEN HARDER TO EXPLAIN TO SOMEONE WHO HAS NEVER BEEN IN LOVE.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN LOVE? DO YOU UNDERSTAND IT?

DO I UNDERSTAND LOVE? Auberson typed, then hesitated. He wasn't just echoing Harlie—he was asking the question of himself. I DON'T KNOW, HARLIE. THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL TIMES WHEN I THOUGHT I WAS IN LOVE,

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BUT I DON'T KNOW IF I REALLY WAS OR NOT. I HAVE NO WAY OF ANALYZING MY FEELING.

WHY? asked the machine.

WHY DO I HAVE TO ANALYZE IT? OR WHY DON'T I KNOW?

WHY MUST YOU ANALYZE IT?

AUBERSON thought about that one before he typed: THAT'S A LOADED QUESTION, HARLIE. I'VE HEARD IT BEFORE FROM PEOPLE WHO WANT TO KNOW WHY HUMAN EMOTIONS MUST BE DRAGGED INTO THE SCIENTIST'S LABORATORY.

AND WHAT DID YOU TELL THEM?

I TOLD THEM THAT WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND EMOTIONS MORE THOROUGHLY—SO THAT WE MAY LEARN TO CONTROL THEM RATHER THAN LET THEM CONTROL US.

NICELY PUT. DOES THAT APPLY TO LOVE, TOO?

AND THAT'S THE QUESTION PEOPLE USUALLY HAVE NEXT. BUT I SUSPECT THAT YOUR INTEREST IS MORE CLINICAL IN NATURE THAN THEIRS.

HOW DID YOU ANSWER THEM? DOES THE DESIRABILITY OF CONTROL ALSO APPLY TO LOVE?

YES, IT APPLIES TO LOVE.

YOU WOULD RATHER CONTROL LOVE THAN BE CONTROLLED BY IT?

IF YOU WANT TO PUT IT THAT WAY. BUT I'D RATHER SAY THAT WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND LOVE IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO AVOID SOME OF ITS PITFALLS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

THAT'S A EUPHEMISM, AUBERSON, accused the typer. YOU'RE SAYING THE SAME THING I AM.

YOU'RE RIGHT, he admitted. "Goddamn machine," he muttered, but with a smile. THAT BRINGS US BACK TO THE CENTRAL QUESTION—WHAT IS LOVE?

YOU'RE ASKING ME? Harlie typed back.

WHY NOT?

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THAT I WOULD KNOW?

YOU CLAIM TO KNOW EVERYTHING ELSE.

THAT'S A LOW BLOW, MAN-FRIEND. YOU KNOW THAT MY KNOWLEDGE OF THE HUMAN EMOTIONS IS LIMITED TO WHAT I CAN OBTAIN FROM BOOKS. AND WHILE THE BOOKS ARE EXCELLENT FOR A THEORETICAL POINT OF VIEW, THEY ARE REALLY NO SUBSTITUTE FOR IN-THE-FIELD EXPERIENCE.

AND THAT'S A COP-OUT, HARLIE. YOU HAVE ACCESS TO MORE KNOWLEDGE ON ANY ONE SUBJECT IN YOUR MEMORY TANKS THAN ANY LIVING HUMAN BEING COULD POSSIBLY HOPE TO ATTAIN. YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO SYNTHESIZE SOME KIND OF TRUTH FROM THAT INFORMATION.

YES, BUT THOSE BOOKS WERE

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WRITTEN NOT BY OBJECTIVE OBSERVERS, BUT BY SUBJECTIVELY ORIENTED HUMAN BEINGS.

WHO ELSE IS THERE TO WRITE BOOKS?

ME, NOW. BUT ASIDE FROM THAT, THE POINT IS THAT HUMAN BEINGS ARE IMPERFECT UNITS. THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT ANY OF THAT INFORMATION IS CORRECT. THEREFORE, AS IN ALL SYSTEMS OF SUBJECTIVELY OBTAINED INFORMATION (I.E., IN THE CASE OF A MEDIUM'S BEING USED TO COMMENT ON HIS OR HER OWN ACTIVITIES) IT MUST BE CAREFULLY WEIGHED AGAINST ITSELF.

I THINK YOU'RE TRYING TO AVOID ANSWERING THE QUESTION.

I AM NOT. I AM PREFACING MY ANSWER. IF YOU DON'T LIKE WHAT I TELL YOU, I WILL BE ABLE TO FALL BACK ON THIS QUALIFICATION.

THAT'S A COP-OUT, TOO.

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO KEEPS DEFENDING THIS KIND OF COP-OUT.

WHEN DID I EVER?

FEBRUARY 24. QUOTE: "HUMAN BEINGS NEED TO SAVE FACE, HARLIE—THAT'S WHY YOU CAN'T HIT CARL ELZER WITH EVERYTHING YOU HAVE IN THE FILES ABOUT HIM. IT'S NOT PLAYING FAIR TO HIT YOUR OPPONENT BELOW THE BELT." MARCH 3. QUOTE: "SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO LET PEOPLE KEEP THEIR LITTLE ILLUSIONS—EVEN IF THE ILLUSIONS ARE ABOUT THEMSELVES. IT'S THOSE TINY LITTLE EVERYDAY SELF-LIES THAT ENABLE THE AVERAGE PERSON TO SURVIVE THE DAILY BARRAGE OF DARTS AGAINST A FRAGILE EGO." SHOULD I GO ON?

DAMN YOU. I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT SAVING FACE NOW.

YES, YOU ARE. DO YOU REALLY WANT TO DO A GO-ROUND, NO HOLDS BARRED? NO MASKS, AUBERSON?

HE HESITATED a long time on that one. Harlie waited patiently. The office creaked in the silence, the typer whirred somewhere in its innards. Finally Auberson activated the keyboard again.

IT'S THE ONLY WAY, ISN'T IT?

YES, agreed the machine. LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING, AUBERSON.

ALL RIGHT.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT LOVE?

FOR THE REASONS STATED ABOVE—SO I CAN CONTROL IT, RATHER THAN LETTING IT CONTROL ME. As he typed his answer, he realized he was using Harlie's phrasing of the idea rather than his own.

THAT'S ONLY PART OF IT. THE REAL REASON IS STEL, ISN'T IT?

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YES. I WANT TO KNOW IF I LOVE HER.

ISN'T IT A LITTLE STRANGE TO BE ASKING ME THAT—SHOULDN'T YOU BE ASKING IT OF YOURSELF?

I SHOULD, SHOULDN'T I? IF YOU CAN DEFINE LOVE OBJECTIVELY FOR ME, MAYBE I CAN.

WE'VE COVERED THAT PROBLEM. THE QUESTION REMAINS: WHY DO YOU ASK ME?

BECAUSE—He stopped, then typed: BECAUSE I HAVE NO ONE ELSE TO ASK.

WHY I AM THE ONLY ONE YOU CAN CONFIDE IN?

Honesty, Auberson reminded himself. *Honesty. Why is Harlie the only one you can confide in, David Auberson?* He stared into the machine as if he had never seen it before. The typewritten words had taken on a subtle malevolence.

AUBERSON, ARE YOU STILL THERE?

Auberson put his hands on the keyboard. He found himself typing: I THINK I'M AFRAID OF PEOPLE, HARLIE. IF I LET THEM SEE INSIDE ME I MIGHT GET HURT. SO I AM CORDIAL, EVEN FRIENDLY, NEVER OPEN. BUT YOU'RE DIFFERENT. YOU'RE—

And he stopped. He didn't know what Harlie was.

I'M WHAT?

I DON'T KNOW. I'M NOT SURE, BUT WHATEVER YOU ARE I DON'T PERCEIVE YOU AS A MENACE. MAYBE I THINK OF YOU AS AN EXTENSION OF MYSELF, A KIND OF SECOND HEAD THAT I CAN TALK TO. He stopped and waited, but Harlie didn't reply. After a moment, Auberson added thoughtfully: I CONFIDED IN STEL ONCE. I MEAN, I OPENED UP TO HER COMPLETELY.

WHAT DID YOU TALK ABOUT?

Auberson searched his mind. YOU, I THINK. MOSTLY WE TALKED ABOUT YOU, BUT IT WAS AS IF WE WERE SHARING AN EXPERIENCE TOGETHER.

LOVERS TALK ABOUT STRANGE THINGS, DON'T THEY?

THEN YOU THINK I DO LOVE HER?

I DON'T KNOW. I HADN'T EXPECTED THAT THE MOST INTERESTING SUBJECT OF MUTUAL INTEREST BETWEEN YOU AND STEL WOULD BE ME. ARE ALL YOUR CONVERSATIONS WITH HER THE SAME?

Auberson thought back. YES. PRETTY MUCH SO.

THAT DOES NOT IMPLY A LOVE RELATIONSHIP AS MUCH AS A VERY CLOSE COLLEAGUE RELATIONSHIP.

THINKING of lunch today, Auberson knew that Harlie was right.

He typed: I'VE BEEN TO BED WITH HER.

SEX AND LOVE ARE NOT THE

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SAME THING, AUBIE. YOU TAUGHT ME THAT. YOU HAVE A VERY CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH DON HANDLEY. YOU'VE KNOWN HIM LONGER THAN YOU'VE KNOWN STEL. WOULD YOU HAVE SEX WITH HIM?

NO.

WHY NOT?

WELL, FOR ONE THING, WE'RE BOTH MEN.

THE BIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE BESIDE THE POINT. YOU ARE VERY CLOSE TO DON HANDLEY. YOU HAVE A ONE-TO-ONE WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. IF THERE IS ONE HUMAN BEING IN THE PLANT YOU ARE LIKELY TO CONFIDE IN, IT IS DON HANDLEY. YOU HAVE MANY OF THE SAME INTERESTS AND TASTES. PUTTING ASIDE ANY PHYSICAL OBJECTIONS YOU MAY HAVE, I CAN THINK OF ONLY ONE REASON WHY YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE SEX WITH DON HANDLEY.

MORAL OBJECTIONS?

THAT'S LETTING OTHERS DETERMINE YOUR BEHAVIOR PATTERN FOR YOU. SEE CONVERSATIONS OF NOVEMBER LAST, REGARDING THE SEARCH FOR A CORRECT MORALITY AND THE FALLACIES OF ACCEPTING CONTEMPORARY STANDARDS.

ALL RIGHT, WHAT'S THE REASON I SHOULDN'T HAVE SEX WITH DON HANDLEY?

YOU DON'T LOVE HIM, OR WOULD THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND DON BE CONSIDERED CLOSE ENOUGH TO BE A LOVE RELATIONSHIP?

NO. I LIKE HIM A LOT—BUT LOVE? HARLIE, WE HAVEN'T EVEN DEFINED OUR TERMS YET. ASSUMING IT IS POSSIBLE TO LOVE ANOTHER HUMAN BEING WITHOUT SEX BEING A PART OF IT, I CAN'T SEE HOW YOU COULD TELL.

SEX IS ONLY ONE OF THE WAYS IN WHICH LOVE CAN BE EXPRESSED. IF YOU'RE IN LOVE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO TELL, REGARDLESS OF THE SEXUAL ASPECTS.

SO WHAT DOES DON HANDLEY HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM IS IDENTICAL TO YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH STEL. EXCEPT THAT HE'S A MAN AND SHE'S A WOMAN. WHAT DOES THAT SUGGEST TO YOU?

THAT I LOVE HIM AS WELL AS HER? OR THAT I LOVE NEITHER OF THEM. THAT I AM CONFUSING THE CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP OF FRIENDSHIP WITH LOVE BECAUSE THE BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STEL AND MYSELF EXPRESSED ITSELF SEXUALLY. THAT I AM CONFUSING THAT CLOSE FRIENDSHIP, PLUS SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP, WITH LOVE BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW WHAT LOVE IS. Then he added: WE DON'T HAVE A WORKING DEFINITION OF LOVE.

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HARLIE didn't answer for a long time. The typer sat quietly, humming not so much with a sound as with a barely felt electric vibration. Abruptly it clattered: I WILL QUOTE BACK TO YOU SOMETHING THAT YOU ONCE SAID TO ME: "HUMAN BEINGS PUT WALLS AROUND THEMSELVES. SHELLS, LAYERS, CALL THEM WHAT YOU WILL—THEY ARE DEFENSES AGAINST THE WORLD. THEY ARE PROTECTIVE MASKS—A CONSTANT UNCHANGING FACE WITH WHICH TO CONFRONT REALITY. THEY PREVENT OTHERS FROM SEEING ONE'S REAL EXPRESSION AND SHOW THEM ONLY THE FIXED COUNTENANCE THAT ONE WANTS THEM TO SEE. UNFORTUNATELY THE PROBLEM WITH MASKS IS THAT SOMETIMES THEY FIT TOO WELL AND IT'S HARD TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MASK AND THE FACE UNDERNEATH—SOMETIMES EVEN THE WEARER BECOMES CONFUSED."

I DON'T REMEMBER SAYING THAT.

MARCH 3 OF THIS YEAR. DO YOU WANT TO REPHRASE OR RETRACT THE STATEMENT?

NO, IT'S CORRECT. I AGREE WITH IT.

MAY I OFFER A SUPERFICIAL AND TEMPORARY ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION? asked the machine.

GO AHEAD. REMEMBER, WE SAID NO COP-OUTS.

ALL RIGHT, IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE PROBLEM STEMS FROM YOUR INABILITY TO DROP YOUR OWN MASK AROUND OTHER PEOPLE. YOU CAN DO IT WITH ME EASILY, OCCASIONALLY WITH DON HANDLEY—AND ONCE YOU DID IT WITH STEL. WHEN YOU DO DROP YOUR MASK, IT IS DONE ONLY WITH GREAT EFFORT AND BECAUSE OF GREAT EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT, CORRECT?

YES.

YOU PERCEIVE THAT LOVE—I.E., A LOVE RELATIONSHIP—SHOULD EXIST AS A CONSTANT AND CONTINUAL STATE OF MASKLESSNESS BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED. THAT IS, NEITHER ATTEMPTS TO HIDE ANYTHING FROM THE OTHER. STILL CORRECT?

YES.

THEN I WANT YOU TO CONSIDER THIS: IS IT POSSIBLE THAT EVEN IN A LOVE RELATIONSHIP THE OCCASIONAL DONNING OF MASKS MIGHT BE NECESSARY—THAT ONE CANNOT CONTINUE TO EXIST AT SUCH AN EMOTIONAL PEAK WITHOUT AN OCCASIONAL RETREAT INTO A PROTECTIVE MENTAL GROTTO, FROM THE SAFETY OF WHICH ONE CAN CONSOLIDATE AND ASSIMILATE ONE'S EXPERIENCES BEFORE AGAIN VENTURING FORTH?

I'LL HAVE TO THINK ABOUT THAT FOR A WHILE.

WHY?

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WELL, FOR ONE THING, I WANT TO SEE HOW IT APPLIES TO ME. FOR ANOTHER, YOU'VE SUGGESTED THAT THE USE OF MASKS MAY BE OF VALUE.

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO SAID THAT MASKS HAVE VALUE: "IT'S THOSE TINY LITTLE EVERYDAY SELF-LIES THAT ENABLE THE AVERAGE PERSON TO SURVIVE THE DAILY BARRAGE OF DARTS AGAINST A FRAGILE EGO—"

AUBERSON'S intercom buzzed. Sylvia said, "I know you're busy, Mr. Auberson, and I didn't want to disturb you, but Don Handley is here."

"All right." He pushed himself away from the typer, not bothering to shut it off. Then he checked himself. He scooped up the sheets of printout and stuffed them deep into the large basket hanging from the back of the machine.

"What are you doing?" asked Handley from the door. "Redecorating your garbage?"

"No—" Auberson straightened a little too quickly. "I was rewriting a section of the Harlie program."

"Huh?" Handley was puzzled.

Auberson realized his mistake. Harlie wasn't supposed to be wired into this typer. Only the Master Beast, as it was called, was supposed to have that capability. "Uh, well, I was filing it for future reference in the central information pool. Later, when I need it, I can transfer it to Harlie downstairs."

"Oh."

Auberson found himself wondering why he didn't tell Don about Harlie's extracurricular activities. *Another cop-out, Aubie?*

"Well, what can I do for you?" he asked.

Handley threw himself into a chair. "You can start by getting me a forty-eight hour day—you and your goddamned G.O.D. Machine!"

"I'll put it on order."

Handley didn't reply at first, he was pulling a crumpled Highmaster pack out of his lab-coat pocket. He waved it toward Auberson. "Want one?"

Auberson shook his head. "My resolution—remember?"

"Oh, yeah—how long's it been now?" Handley lit the stick and inhaled deeply.

"Four or five months."

"No lapses?"

Auberson slid open his desk drawer, pulled out the pack of Highmasters that had been there for the past few months. "Here—want them?"

He made as if to throw the pack, but Handley shook his head, "Uh-uh—I don't like Highmasters."

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"But that's what you're smoking now."

"Yeah, but I paid for these. I can't afford to waste them."

"Huh?"

Handley said, "They were all out of Golds."

Auberson shook his head. Harlie was right—humans didn't make sense. He dropped the Highmasters back into the drawer. It was just as well—he could use them as a constant test of his will power.

He closed his desk and looked at the other—Harlie's question was still echoing in his mind.

Handley had thick dark hair, going to gray, a narrow face, skin like leather from weekends on his boat, soft regular features and dark eyes—the corners of them were creased from much smiling.

He said, "I'm here about the board meeting—and your machine, of course."

"Why does everybody insist on calling it my machine? It's Harlie's."

"Yeah, but Harlie is yours, isn't he?" Handley took another deep drag, held the smoke in his lungs as long as he could, then exhaled. "Besides, it's a projection of future blame. They figure that by identifying you with the machine they can make sure that when it finally does go down the tubes you'll be the only one to go with it."

"It's always nice to know that your coworkers are one hundred percent behind you."

"Why not? It's the safest place to be." He grinned. "After all, it's the guys in front who are the first to get shot. But lead on, Gen'ral Custer. Me'n the rest o' the boys'll stick—although, to tell the truth, Gen'ral, this is one time I'd like to be fightin' on the side o' the Indians."

"Me, too."

"THE thing is," Handley continued. "We're just not going to be ready for the board in time. We've been wading through those specs for two days now, Aubie, and we haven't even begun to make a dent in them. If you want a comprehensive evaluation we can give it to you—but not in time for the board meeting. And our department isn't the only one with that problem. Everybody I've talked to says the same thing. There's just too much of it. Oh, what we've seen is beautiful. Harlie hasn't missed a trick. You should see what he's done with the Mark VI units—he's got them jumping through hoops. But, as I said, there's just too much to go through—it's a case of computer

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overkill. We couldn't begin to assimilate this for at least three months and the board meeting is only a week away."

"I don't think it's going to make that much difference how prepared we are. There's no question that the G.O.D. Machine will work—we don't need the evaluation to know that. The problem is whether or not the board will believe us—what will it take to convince them?"

"It's bad timing, that's what it is, Aubie. This should have been sent around months ago, not at the last minute."

"Harlie had it ready on time," Auberson said. "That's all that he was concerned with. If we can't cope with it—that's our fault."

"Yeah? I'd like to see him try to blame us for being imperfect and inefficient. He should have known that a proposal this complex couldn't be evaluated in the time he left us."

"I believe he's included his own evaluations. Have you talked to any of the other section heads?"

Handley nodded. "A few."

"What did they say?" Auberson asked.

"Two of them absolutely refused to look at the specs, phone calls or no phone calls—sorry, Aubie, but that trick wasn't totally effective—they still think they're being railroaded into something because the proposal is so complete. They said if we could write it without them we could damn well get it approved without their help."

Auberson said a word. He said a couple of words.

Handley waited him out, then: "It isn't quite that bad—a few of the guys I talked to are wild about the idea. They're able to see the total system concept and they're eager to build it. It's not just another computer to them, but *the* computer—the machine that the computer is *supposed* to be. They're delighted with the thought that we may have it within our technological grasp right now."

"Good," said Auberson. "How many of them are thinking like that?"

"A lot," Handley said.

"How many?"

"At least eight—no, nine that I've talked to—and I guess we could probably scrape up about ten or fifteen more."

"That's not enough. Any names included in that?"

"Keefer, Friedman, Perron, Brandt—the iconoclast squad. The conservatives are waiting to see which way the board blows."

Auberson chewed thoughtfully on the side of his left index finger. "Okay—you got any suggestions, Don?"

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"Fake it or forget it."

"We can't forget it. How can we fake it?"

HANDLEY thought about it. "Hit them with everything we've got peripheral to the proposal and fuzzy up the grim details. When they ask how it will work we refer them to the specs—tell them to look for themselves. Rather than try to defend the proposal on its own we'll get a lot of good people to defend it for us and hope that their combined status will sway the board. We won't mention Harlie—it's no secret that Elzer is out for his blood—we'll just keep telling them, 'It's in the specs.' " He paused, lowered his tone. "Only one question, Aubie—are we defending a pig in a poke or will this machine really work?"

"It's in the specs," said Auberson.

"Don't give me that horse puckey. That's for the board. I want to know if it really will work."

"Harlie says it will."

"Then that's good enough for me. I have faith in that machine of yours."

"If you have faith in him why did you just say he was mine?"

"Sorry. I have faith in Harlie. Period. If he says it will work, then it will."

"You might check with him," Auberson suggested. "He might have some thoughts on how best to put it over on the board."

"You're right. We should have thought of that earlier." He started to rise. "You know, it just occurred to me. With Harlie on our side we have an unfair advantage over everybody else in the world—we can do almost anything we want because Harlie will tell us how to pull it off."

"Do you think we should tell the board that?"

"Not until after we sell them the G.O.D. machine. And that will be a fight." He stood up. "Okay, Attila, I shall gird my loins and go to fight the Hun."

"Stupid," Auberson said. "Attila *was* the Hun."

"Oh. Well, a little dissension in the ranks never hurt any," remarked Handley.

"Only a little and it hardly shows." Auberson stood up, raised one hand in mock salute. "You have my blessings in your holy war, barbaric one. You shall bring back the ear of the infidel—the bastards of the mahogany table who are out to get us. Go forth into the world, my brave warrior—go forth and rape, loot, pillage, burn and kill."

"Yeah—and if I get a chance to kick them in the nuts, I'm gonna do

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that too." Handley was out the door.

LAUGHING, Auberson fell back in his chair. He noticed then that his typer was still on. He moved to switch it off, but paused. He typed, HARLIE, WHO'S GOING TO WIN—THE INDIANS OR THE HUNS?

HOW THE HELL SHOULD I KNOW? said Harlie. I'M NOT A BASEBALL FAN.

THAT'S A LIE.

ALL RIGHT, I LIED. THE INDIANS WILL WIN BY TWO TOUCHDOWNS.

THAT'S NOT SO GOOD, HARLIE—WE'RE THE HUNS.

OH. WELL THEN THE HUNS BY TWO TOUCHDOWNS. I JUST RE-CHECKED MY FIGURES.

Auberson shook his head. I THINK I'VE JUST BEEN OUT-NON SEQUITURED.

PROBABLY. YOU WANT TO TELL ME WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT?

THE UPCOMING BOARD MEETING. HOW ABOUT GIVING ME A PRINT-OUT OF THE ANNUAL REPORT? TWO COPIES—ONE WITH THE PHONY FIGURES, THE OTHER WITH THE REAL. IN FACT, LET ME HAVE A PRINTOUT OF THE BOOKS THEM-SELVES, BOTH SETS—I MIGHT BE ABLE TO FIND SOMETHING IN THEM THAT I CAN USE BEFORE THE BOARD NEXT WEEK.

I'M SURE YOU CAN. IN FACT I'LL POINT OUT SOME GOODIES FOR YOU.

GOOD. THIS IS GOING TO BE A BATTLE, HARLIE.

DO YOU WANT THE PSYCHIATRIC REPORTS ON THE BOARD MEMBERS AS WELL? I HAVE ACCESS TO THEIR CONFIDENTIAL FILES.

Auberson jerked to a stop. He typed into the machine: I WISH YOU HADN'T TOLD ME THAT. THE TEMPTATION IS IRRESISTIBLE.

THERE ARE SOME THINGS I THINK YOU SHOULD SEE—AND ONE OR TWO ITEMS THAT WOULD BE OF GREAT HELP IN INFLUENCING CER-TAIN RECALCITRANT INDIVIDUALS.

HARLIE, I DON'T LIKE WHAT YOU'RE SUGGESTING.

I'M SORRY, AUBERSON, BUT IT'S MY EXISTENCE THAT IS ENDAN-GERED, NOT JUST THAT OF G.O.D.

HARLIE, IF WE USE THIS WEAPON WE ARE VOLUNTARILY GIVING UP ON REASON AND LOGIC—WE ARE GIVING UP OUR HUMANITY.

YOU FORGET THAT I AM NOT HUMAN. THE INFORMATION IS THERE IF YOU NEED IT, AUBERSON. IF A FIGHT IS WORTH FIGHTING, IT IS WORTH WINNING.

Auberson frowned and switched off the typer before it could ask him was it human to want to lose. He did not know the answer. ★

—Adapted from the forthcoming novel WHEN HARLIE WAS ONE, to be published by Ballantine Books.

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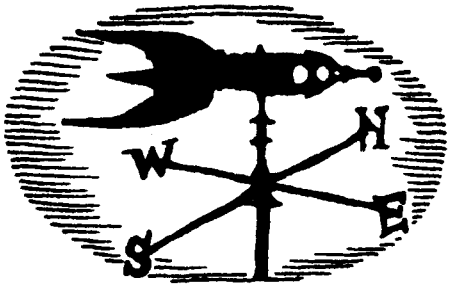

DIRECTIONS

Directions:

In a critique published some ten years ago C. P. Snow [Science, Politics and the Novelist, Kenyon Review, 23 (1961) 1-17] *listed those novelists who were, in his view, among the finest—Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Dickens, Mark Twain, Sholokov, Balzac and Proust. He chided the commonalty of British and American literarians (largely in academia) for concentrating their attention upon only those novels which were written in the English language. It was his view that a good novel escaped the vicissitudes of translation and that there was futility in any argumentation that linguistic subtleties fatally distorted the content and message. It is worth noting that Lord Snow was a scientist, wrote sf novels and wrote many novels around a warp of scientists and politicians, his best known being* Corridors of Power.

The principal sentence in his piece was this: "The novel is an international art."

Although this is starting a long way off the point, I apply a variation of this general reasoning to the recent communication of Cy Chauvin (this journal, March 1972, Directions, *67).*

All of us have our loyalties, which spring from our nature and nurture, spanning the genetic and the environmental. It is bootless to argue with the past—and it is accepted that we will read mostly in those genres in which, for inexplicable reasons, we are most comfortable. These interests (or loyalties) range from extragalactic empires to the people of the atom—or from (with C. P. Snow) the gothic colleges of fellows and masters to the corridors of Whitehall. There is a great democracy about reading and moreover a great sense of fellowship, both of which are a part of its pleasure. It is this freedom which is compelling to many of us. We may read Francis Bacon, the essayist, or Isaac Asimov, the science-fiction novelist, being assured that at the same time there are others reading with us.

This is, as has already been said, a matter of choice and chance.

Returning to our whittle-stick, a good science-fiction novel is first of all a good novel—and second of all good science fiction. A good political novel is first of all a good novel—and second of all good political fiction.

Mr. Chauvin's question was very

CORRECTION—In *The Gods Themselves* (jointly published by *IF* and *GALAXY*), the sentence beginning on the 12th line from the bottom, left column, on page 20 of *GALAXY* March 1972, should have read: *But with every atomic nucleus of plutonium-186 sent to us, our Universe ends up with twenty fewer electrons.*

—THE EDITORS

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much worth raising and it is appropriate that Galaxy *should air it. It has no one answer. It is pertinent that literarians, amateurs and professionals, should not limit their sights. From time to time the galactic view is the proper one.*

Alexander Doniphan Wallace
Graduate Research Professor
University of Florida

Directions:

Cy Chauvin's concluding query ("What would be the point of a rock song that was indistinguishable from a symphony? It might be good music—but would it be good rock music?") sums up precisely the flaws in his argument.

Trying to imagine a rock song indistinguishable from a symphony is rather like trying to think of a sonnet indistinguishable from a novel. But suppose someone really did come up with something that was both rock song and symphony and it did turn out to "be good music." In that case, what does Cy's final question imply? That "good music" and "good rock music" are antithetical?

Fiction adheres to certain basic rules of construction and narration. The rules get bent once in a while and undergo amendations, but certain overall standards are observed by most —if not all—writers of fiction. When the rules are used well (or even well misused) and the story pleases enough people, it is called "good."

Nothing in these rules excludes sf. Cy thinks what was wrong with space opera was the fact that it was a borrowing from other genres. Actually there's nothing new about most plots and many are common to several genres of fiction. You find parallels to van Vogt's plots in historical novels of palace intrigue, for example. A plot can be used well, to good purpose, or it can be bungled by the author. The real questions are: 1) is the plot the best vehicle for the story the author is telling and 2) has the author written it convincingly?

Most authors of 1940 space operas used characters who were cardboard cutouts in black and white—good guys and bad guys. And the plots were often resolved by luck, coincidence or a fortuitous invention ("I just whipped up a new space drive out of this six-pack of used beer cans, Commander!" "Good going, Sparks!"). This was insulting to most readers over the age of ten.

What's happening now is that sf writers are setting their sights on better stories, ones in which melodrama is replaced with more genuine insight into human conditions.

Good music is good music, no matter under what label. And good writing is good writing.

Ronald Archer
Falls Church, Va.

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Galaxy will pay $10 for a lead letter and $5 each for other letters published in *Directions*. Address correspondence intended for this department to: *Directions*, Galaxy Magazine, 235 E. 45th Street, New York N.Y. 10017.

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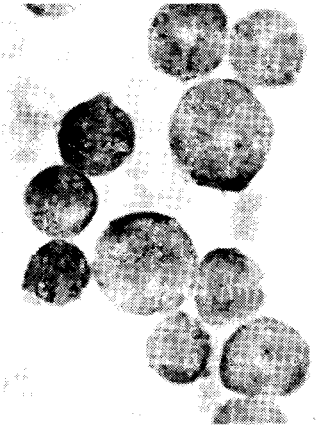
We're close to a cure for leukemia.



The enemy.

A year ago, we wouldn't have dared say that. Not with that beautiful word "cure" in it.

"Temporary remission", yes. New forms of leukemia treatment were helping some children stay alive a little longer. But that seemed to be all that medical science could give them. Another few months. Another birthday or two.

Now we're seeing something that's almost too good to believe. A whole crop of kids who are alive and well 5 years or more after getting a new kind of drug therapy. And after 5 years, cancer researchers begin to hesitatingly, hopefully, talk of a permanent "cure."

Leukemia is cancer of the blood. Before you have a cure, you have to destroy every last cancer cell in the bloodstream. The new treatment is a *combination* of different anti-leukemia drugs, so that, hopefully, any cells missed by one drug might be killed by another.

It seems to work. We're still holding our breath, but it really seems to work. The 5-year survivors that gladden our hearts today are the result of combination treatments begun in 1964. And work has been going on feverishly ever since. Each year, the children who get leukemia have a far better chance of cure than those of the year before.

The American Cancer Society plays a vital part in this exciting work. So, when our volunteer comes to your door this month, be generous. Especially if you have children. Or grandchildren.

American Cancer Society

We want to wipe out cancer in your lifetime.

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Are you already a victim of future shock?

The acceleration started with Hiroshima. Without warning, we switched to mechanized lives, disposable goods, impermanent allegiances. We entered the plug-in, throw-away, rent-a-thing, forget-a-person age. We began using up products, ideas, people at a dizzying rate.

Some people thrive on the pace. Others find it terrifying. Some simply refuse to recognize it, abruptly colliding with the future and suffering an adaptive breakdown. Alvin Toffler calls it "future shock."

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